



ENTERPRISE - MISSION

a STAR TREK
fanzine

REVIEW 2

ENTERPRISE
MISSION REVIEW 2

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February 1982

Scotpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton and Shona

THE BIRD OF TIME by Valerie Piacentini

The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly - and lo! the Bird is on the Wing.

Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

* * * * *

For the hundredth time Jim Kirk paused in his aimless pacing and glared balefully at the unheeding facade of the Guardian of Forever. He knew a little more now about its operation, and it was certainly not functioning as he had expected.

There were two methods by which a traveller could return - after a specified interval in the time to which he had gone, or by retracing his steps to the exact point of entry, and calling the Guardian to his assistance. Spock, uncertain how long it would take him to locate his own younger self, and to repair the damaged time-line, had opted for the latter method.

Kirk also knew that time passed differently when the Guardian was in operation - on that first journey into Earth's past he and Spock had been away for some weeks, while for Scotty and the landing party, only seconds had elapsed; and on this latest disastrous expedition he, Spock and Erikson had spent two and a half days in the Orion Empire, though in 'real' time they had been gone only thirty minutes.

So where was Spock? More than five hours had passed for Kirk since the Vulcan had stepped into the vortex of the Guardian; the Human had waited stubbornly, ignoring all attempts to persuade him to return to the Enterprise.

"He failed, Jim - accept that." McCoy had been the last to try. "But the ship is still here, and your friends...and Thelin's a good officer, I'll vouch for that."

"No!" Kirk snapped, sick with misery. Of course, Thelin was the only First Officer this McCoy knew, he had no personal interest in the problems of a strange Vulcan...but Kirk could not forget a pair of dark eyes that gazed trustingly, half-smiling, into his. "I'll wait, Doctor."

And he did wait, for another interminable hour, the realisation gradually growing in him that Spock would not be coming back.

Time... So confused, so convoluted... They should never have meddled with it. Had not Edith's fate been warning enough? And now...Spock dead, at seven years, a small, confused and very lonely child...

Thelin was still on the ship...so the child had died... Or had Spock succeeded, then somehow been unable to return, become lost in the past? He had to know... Deliberately Kirk opened his communicator and called the ship.

"Captain! Are ye ready to beam up?" came Scotty's anxious enquiry.

"Negative. Send me down a Vulcan desert cloak, survival rations and a medical kit, Scotty."

"Sir! Are ye sure...?"

"Mr. Scott, that was an order!" Kirk's tone was glacial, and he received in response a chastened "Aye, Captain." Moments later the requested items shimmered into existence.

Kirk pulled the cloak's concealing hood around his face and advanced determinedly towards the Guardian. "I want to visit the planet Vulcan, just outside the city of ShiKahr; time..." He paused, remembering. "The twenty-first day of Tasmeen." That was the closest he could come, allowing that Spock had achieved his purpose. "And Guardian - set me down as close as possible to Commander Spock's point of entry. I will request return when ready."

"Time and place are ready to receive you," came the Guardian's sonorous tones. "The entry point coincides exactly."

Without a moment's hesitation Kirk stepped through the time portal.

He materialised on a barren, rocky hillside; almost at his feet a slab of rock bore a faint mark, Spock's indication of his point of return. He added his own initials, on the faint chance that Spock might even yet find his way here during his absence, and would know from that that Kirk was looking for him. Then, turning his face in the direction of the city, Kirk set out on his quest.

The route was familiar to him, for he had walked these hills with Spock; it was difficult to revise that in fact those expeditions lay in the future. Once within the city however his steps slowed uncertainly as he wondered what to do - it would be risky to call at the house and ask for Selek - Sarek was not easily deceived, and if he saw Kirk now he would surely remember the encounter when he boarded the Enterprise... It would create yet another anomaly in time, with unpredictable results.

Kirk halted across the street from Sarek's house, considering his best approach; then he shrank back behind a concealing pillar as the house door opened and Sarek himself emerged, escorting an elderly Vulcan dressed in the robes of a Healer. Behind him came Amanda, and at her side... It could only be Spock. Kirk stared in fascination at the child who would one day become his First Officer and friend; then realised suddenly that if the child was here, Spock must have succeeded in his mission.

So, where was he? The presence of a Healer... That was disturbing...

After exchanging farewells with his host the Healer turned to leave; Kirk thought rapidly, then making sure that the others had re-entered the house he stepped forward and greeted the Vulcan.

"Forgive the intrusion," he said softly, "but may I speak to you for a moment?" He blessed the fact that Spock had taught his Vulcan so carefully - it was unlikely that the man would speak Terran.

"How may I serve you?" The Healer was politely curious, recognising the stranger as Human.

"I had arranged to meet an associate of mine, a distant cousin of Sarek's named Selek. He was not at the meeting place, and I thought to enquire at the house, but I do not wish to intrude if there is illness."

"No - no illness, Sarek merely wished to be reassured that his son was well - the child was involved in an accident last night. However, I fear that you are too late; Sarek informed me that his cousin Selek continued his journey early this morning. Perhaps you may overtake him on the road."

Kirk bowed. "Thank you for your courtesy, sir. I will do as you suggest."

The Healer watched him go thoughtfully; really, these Humans were not too bad when you got used to them. The Lady Amanda for example was a model Vulcan wife, and the young man who had spoken to him had been properly respectful. Yes, he thought, I will vote in council to further our association with Earth.

Kirk retraced his steps, frowning. Spock had left Sarek's house, and could only have been trying to return; but he had not reached the entry point. Had he, perhaps, been injured, sought shelter? Otherwise Kirk would have met him on the road... There were no dwellings the way he had come, but Kirk remembered suddenly that Spock had once shown him a complex of caves in the foothills... he might be there, unable to continue his journey... Kirk quickened his pace.

The caves were cool, and Kirk welcomed the respite from the blazing sun; but he knew that for Spock the temperature would be uncomfortably cold. At first he searched at random, but his usual clear-headedness reminded him that one of the caves contained a natural spring, and was therefore the most likely place for the Vulcan to be...if indeed he was within the caves at all.

He had forgotten that part of the cavern roof had fallen in, admitting a flood of light that revealed a huddled shape sprawled against the rear wall. Kirk hurried across and knelt to turn the limp body gently; it was Spock.

He closed his eyes, savouring for a moment the sheer relief of finding his friend alive; but as he brushed back the hood of the desert cloak he recoiled in shock when his hand touched the burning heat of the Vulcan's skin.

Gently Kirk opened the cloak, and saw that beneath the concealing folds the sleeves of Spock's tunic had been slashed to ribbons, stained green with blood. Long scratches disfigured his arms, the flesh swollen and angry. For a moment anger set him trembling - how could Sarek have allowed him to leave in this condition? - then he realised that Spock had probably concealed his injuries and tried to return to the Enterprise for treatment in case a Vulcan Healer detected the Human elements in his blood and became suspicious.

Kirk shrugged off his own cloak and opened the medical kit he had brought, carefully cleaning the vicious scars and bandaging them; then he covered Spock with both cloaks, and brought him water from the spring.

As he raised the dark head to his shoulder Spock's eyes flickered open; the Vulcan seemed to have some difficulty in focussing as he peered at Kirk through a haze of pain.

At last, with some difficulty, he managed, "Jim!"

"Yes, of course. Drink this, Spock - you must be thirsty."

Spock swallowed avidly, the cool water soothing his parched throat. "You should not have come," he said at last. "It is dangerous...you could alter the future..."

"It was altered, for me," Kirk said, his voice rough with emotion. "You didn't come back. Thelin was still on the ship... I had to find you, Spock."

The dark eyes dropped before his. "Thank you, Jim."

Kirk produced a laugh that was very close to tears. "One does not thank logic," he quoted. "I didn't fancy trying to command a ship I didn't know, with a total stranger as First Officer, instead of... and besides, there could have been other differences that I didn't have time to discover."

Spock looked up again, his eyes lighting in his half smile. "Thank you, anyway," he whispered; then he shuddered as a spasm of pain racked him.

"What's wrong?"

"Last night...the...the child...was attacked by a le-matya; between us the sehlat and I overcame it. But...the sehlat died...and I am dying."

"No!" Kirk's arms tightened in instinctive denial.

"It is no use, Jim." The Vulcan sighed at his friend's vehemence. "The bite of a le-matya is poisonous to Vulcans... there is no cure."

"But you are half Human." Kirk was frantic.

"Yes; that has given me a little resistance, but no immunity. Death is inevitable."

Kirk stared down in horror at the tranquil face; was this how it was to end, in a confused web of Time's weaving?

"No," he repeated stubbornly. "There must be something I can do - I won't let you die."

"You have no choice, Jim. Even if I was able to reach the Guardian and return to our own time, there is nothing that could be done for me. But I am... pleased," his voice dropped to a whisper, "that you are with me."

There was no reply Kirk could make in words. He could only settle the

Vulcan's head more comfortably on his shoulder, hoping that his physical presence and his touch - the only one from which Spock did not shrink - would comfort his friend.

After a time Spock seemed to fall into a light sleep, and Kirk allowed the grief and worry to show in his eyes as he looked down at the pale face against his shoulder. Everything in him rebelled at this stupid waste - Spock had saved his younger self, only to die in doing so; what was the point? And he, Kirk - what awaited him now? What would he find on the other side of the Guardian? He shuddered at the thought of returning, his memories intact, to an Enterprise where Thelin held Spock's place...and there could be other changes, so that he would find himself a stranger in a world he had loved.

Worst of all was the grief he felt for the future Spock would never see now, the years of companionship that were lost to them both, all the plans they had made... And just as he had begun to accept his Human blood.

His Human blood... Kirk thought about that very carefully, refusing to allow himself to hope. It was ridiculous, illogical...but Kirk was too much of a fighter to let even the smallest chance slip by untested. Gently, he laid Spock down and turned to pick up the medical kit.

Kirk had just finished redressing the last of the scratches when Spock stirred and woke; aware of some difference he glanced down, saw the fresh dressings and raised puzzled eyes to his Captain.

"What have you done?"

"I was only trying to make you more comfortable." Trying to speak lightly Kirk lifted the water flask. "Would you like another drink?"

Suspicious, the Vulcan watched him carefully and saw that as Kirk moved he deliberately concealed his left hand. Spock reached out and turned the Human towards him; Kirk was not quick enough to conceal the bandage around his left wrist.

"What have you done?" Spock repeated.

"Spock, I had to try it," Kirk said. "I thought...the Human elements in your blood slowed your reaction to the poison...it seemed possible that Human blood might therefore contain an antidote. I gave you a sedative to keep you out, opened the scratches and dressed them with a mixture of antiseptic powder and my blood. I gave you more blood by injection..."

"And seriously weakened yourself in the process," interrupted Spock, seeing the pallor of the Human's face. "You should not have risked yourself...I cannot believe it will do any good."

"I had to try," Kirk repeated stubbornly; and Spock sighed, aware of his Captain's determination.

"Rest, then," he said, pulling Kirk down beside him. After a moment he continued, "Jim... I am grateful."

Kirk gave his arm a reassuring pat, and settled down. Despite his intention to keep watch he was soon asleep. Outside the cave the shadows lengthened towards evening.

Kirk awoke several times during the night. On the first occasion it was dark and very cold, so he used his phaser to heat a section of the cave wall. The dim glow from the heated rock was not bright enough to disturb Spock, but gave enough light for Kirk to see what he was doing as he drew more blood from the vein in his arm and injected it into Spock. He repeated the dose each time he woke, unable to tell if the treatment was having any effect, but continuing with it as the only thing he could do. The drain on his own reserves of strength was considerable, however, and at last he fell into a deep, exhausted sleep.

The sun was high in the sky when Kirk next awoke, its questing rays filling the alcove with a gentle warmth that held the promise of the scorching heat to come.

Kirk went to drink at the spring, then refilled the water flask and moved back to Spock; the Vulcan was awake, watching him with fever-filled eyes. Smiling a reassurance he did not feel Kirk reached for the hypo, but Spock's powerful hands closed round his arm.

"No, Jim."

"But I must try..."

"You have tried, but it is too late. I know I do not have long... It is pointless to weaken yourself further. I am dying, Jim."

The dark eyes held no fear, only concern and a wistful regret. Kirk's instinctive denial died unspoken as he accepted that Spock did indeed know his own condition.

"I wanted you to live," he whispered.

"I know. It seems that it was not meant that we should continue together. Jim, will you...will you remain with me until...?"

"Do you need to ask?" Kirk lifted despairing eyes to his friend. "Then what?" he asked dully. "What can I do...when...?"

"You will return to the Enterprise," Spock replied firmly. "Be her Captain as you have always been mine. In that time line you will be the only one who remembers that once I stood at your side...but Jim, look to your future - you have so much still to do."

"Without you, it no longer seems important, but I will do as you ask."

Spock's eyes lightened, and he reached out to clasp Kirk's hand firmly; the Human knelt in silence, watching the pale face intently, unwilling to lose one moment of Spock's companionship, one glance from those unshielded eyes. He was numb, his grief was contained for the moment, but he knew that when he returned to that unfamiliar Enterprise the absence of his trusted friend would be almost intolerable...and there would be no-one to understand, no-one to share his grief.

Kirk's hand tightened as Spock's breathing grew harsher, more laboured. Slipping his arm under Spock he raised the dark head to his shoulder, gazing down in anguish.

"Jim..." Spock's hand rose, brushed Kirk's eyes. "Your tears...for me..."

"Don't leave me," Kirk choked helplessly.

"It seems that I must." Spock smiled then, his rare delightful smile that as always tore Kirk's heart. There was a moment's silence, then the dark eyes widened suddenly. "Jim...I was wrong...the other side...the other side of time..." His head fell back on Kirk's shoulder.

"What do you mean?" Kirk began, then fell silent in horrified realisation. The slim body was heavy in his arms, the skin already cooling; as he moved, the dark head rolled limply on his shoulder.

"No! Oh no!" With a groan of despair Kirk pulled his friend closer, burying his face in the silky hair; slow tears spilled from his eyes unnoticed as he wept quietly, bitterly.

It was mid-afternoon when Kirk paused at the entrance of the cave, turning back for one last look at the low pile of stones that concealed an unmarked grave; then heedless of the blazing sun he set his face to the path and walked slowly, determinedly, back to the contact point.

Almost he wished the journey longer, dreading the moment when he would step onto the bridge without Spock's presence at his side. Instead there would be Thelin, an unknown quantity...but Kirk was aware that the Andorian, however

competent he might prove to be, would never take the place of his Vulcan. If only McCoy had remembered too...at least then there would have been someone to understand, to share the pain...

So absorbed was Kirk in his sombre thoughts that he scarcely noticed when the swirling mists of the Guardian reached for him; only the cooler temperature of the ruined planet roused him for a moment, then he pulled out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise - Scott here."

"Stand by, Mr. Scott." Kirk paused for a moment before saying the words.

"One... One to beam up."

He started awake, roused by the insistent bleep of the intercom. "Yes?"

"The Captain is coming aboard, Commander."

"Thank you." He deactivated the screen and sank into a chair, pressing his hands to his eyes to dispel the memory of the dream... No, not a dream, he thought suddenly. What, then?

But he knew. Dressing hurriedly he left his quarters, heading directly for the transporter room. "Has the Captain beamed up yet?" he asked.

"No, sir." Kyle did not seem surprised at the question. "I've just been notified that he appeared on the sensors, but he hasn't given the order to beam him up yet."

"Very well. I will handle the controls myself. Dismissed." Alone, he waited only a few moments before he received the expected call.

"Kirk to Enterprise. Energise."

The familiar figure shimmered out of silver mist into safe reality, and his eyes were soft as he watched the arrival. "Captain?"

There was no response. Kirk's shoulders were slumped as though beneath an intolerable weight, his eyes cast down as he carefully descended from the transporter platform.

"Captain? Jim?"

The bowed head lifted at that, and the dull eyes narrowed painfully. "Hallucinations already?" Laughter rasped harshly in the Human's throat. "Go away - you're not real."

"Jim, I am real." Spock stepped forward, catching Kirk's arms in a painful grip, shaking him slightly to emphasise the words.

"How...? I don't understand." Kirk shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. One hand rose and gently, carefully, explored Spock's head and face, seeking out the well-known features. "You - here? Then the Guardian..." The Human was trembling with shock. "You were dead...I watched you die, held you, buried you... I didn't imagine it, Spock; an illusion couldn't have hurt so much."

"You did not imagine it," Spock agreed. "I saw what you saw - at first I thought it a dream. Now I believe it was your mind reaching for mine across time."

"It's not possible," Kirk breathed, but hope shone in his eyes. "You went back to repair the damaged time line, and died as an adult. How can you be here?"

"The child survived, and grew to manhood to become your First Officer, Jim," the Vulcan replied. "I think we were caught in a loop in time - the 'I' who was Selek died of the le-matya's bite, but the child... I can detect only one difference, Jim - I did not travel with you to the Orion Empire."

"So..." Kirk hesitated. "All is as it was when we reached the Guardian?"

"I am sure of it. My memories are clear until then, but the events you

recall since your return from the Empire are to me only a confused vision seen through your eyes."

"Selek?"

"Even that. He saved me, but I understand now -- he was not my adult self, as we thought, but the 'I' from a different time line. We are as we were, Jim -- I do not think I could bear it if it were different." The last words were almost whispered, and Kirk, echoing the Vulcan's relief, sagged slightly, feeling the powerful arm encircle his shoulders in support. For a moment the two stood in silence, simply allowing their joy to flow from mind to mind; then Kirk drew a deep breath, and straightened.

"The Guardian..." he said thoughtfully.

"Is more dangerous than we knew," Spock finished for him. "I will report on this -- we cannot risk using the portal again until we understand much more."

"If we ever do..." Kirk's voice was very soft. "If we ever do, Spock, it must be together. I couldn't go through all that again."

"Nor I," Spock admitted quietly.

Kirk's eyes were lifting to Spock's when the transporter room door opened abruptly, and he turned away.

"So there you are!" McCoy's voice rang with indignation. "If you've quite finished playing hide and seek, Mr. Spock, I'm ready for your medical. My instruments are all recalibrated."

"You don't know the half!" Kirk chuckled.

"Huh?"

"You might have had...to...recalibrate...for an Andorian!"

Even Spock seemed mildly amused at that, and McCoy snorted in indignation. "Andorian, Vulcans, whatever... I'll tell you, Jim Kirk, there are times when you're weirder than any of them!"

A SOLAR SYSTEM by T.G.Z.C.

As seen from Space...

A blaze of light, many tiny sparks around it
 Circling, circling; they in turn
 Surrounded by minute sparklets in a captive orbit,
 A necklet of shining jewels
 Infinitely precious; yet in the void of space
 Seemingly negligible.
 Yet those tiny sparks of light, so small
 To the distant observer
 Are huge, lifegiving, to the many species
 Of creature living there.

Space... black void...

So very, very cold...

So far from any sun.

* * *

A silver Starship --

Warmth and friendship --

Haven of comfort... home.

ORDEAL by Valerie Piacentini

Beyond any doubt, Kirk thought, this room had been expressly designed to remove any lingering feelings of hope. The walls had been painted a drab unrelieved green, the monotonous surfaces broken only by a narrow window which looked out onto the blank wall of the building opposite, and by two heavy doors. Through one of these he had entered - how long ago was it? - with his two friends; through the other he would soon pass - alone. It seemed that the fear and hopelessness of the uncounted numbers who had preceded him through that door lingered heavily in the air, mingling with a distinct, indefinable aroma that was almost, but not quite, familiar.

Across the room, McCoy leaned against the window, gazing out at the grey leaden sky; he turned now, feeling Kirk's gaze on him, his blue eyes filled with pain and regret. Somehow Kirk found the courage to smile, to silently tell his friend that of course he understood; in the medical kit were drugs that would relax him, place a barrier between his conscious mind and the Ordeal that was to come, but even on this primitive world the presiding Technician might detect their presence, and all would be lost. The Enterprise would not return for another forty eight hours, and despite all his efforts, the Ordeal could be postponed no longer.

The doctor's face grew hazy as the pain mounted higher; he felt sick, dizzy - he fought for control, knowing that he must not fail now. One final effort, one last test of endurance - if only he could hold on!

A strong, gentle hand caught his, slim fingers touched his face lightly, and the pain receded a little; he looked up into dark, anxious eyes that studied him concernedly. Kirk sighed with relief and relaxed for a moment against the strong shoulder, enjoying the temporary respite, but all too soon he pulled away. This mission had been hard on all of them - his own mysterious fever, McCoy's broken wrist - even Spock had not adapted too well to this world. If only the Enterprise had not had to leave them! Still, too late for regrets now, it was almost over. The illness of the other two had been a great strain on the Vulcan, and for this reason Kirk had forbidden Spock to link with him, but as usual he had set his concern for his Captain above his own welfare, giving his last reserves of strength to help Kirk endure what was to come. The selflessness of that giving increased Kirk's determination - he would survive this Ordeal, for if he broke, if he betrayed himself, both these valued friends would suffer, Spock most of all.

The sinister door opened at last with a suddenness that took them all by surprise; a white-robed Technician stood there, silently motioning Kirk to follow. He rose obediently, hesitated, glanced at McCoy; the blue eyes tried to smile encouragement, but were dimmed by an apprehension he could not conceal. Kirk found that his hands were shaking, and he clasped them together, trying to conceal the evidence of his fear; a warm, strong hand closed over his fingers for an instant, stilling the trembling, and with one last look into the compassionate eyes Kirk turned and followed the Technician. As he crossed the threshold he glanced back in time to see Spock rise to greet McCoy, who had crossed to him, instinctively seeking to share his support at this moment. He need not fear for them, he thought, for they would comfort each other as they waited; only he must somehow find the courage to go on alone, to pass through the Ordeal without betraying himself.

* * *

A short stretch of corridor - too short, he could have wished it longer - then the white-robed figure beckoning him through yet another door, thick, heavy, close-fitting; he shuddered, knowing the reason for its weight - screams would be muffled by the heavy wood, not reaching the room where the others waited. But unhearing, they would still know, would live every second of torment, each stab of pain with him.

The chair waited; unresisting, he allowed himself to be guided into its metal and leather embrace. There was no point in fighting now, and delay would only prolong the agony. Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed the flash of metal, and resolved not to look. Useless; despite himself his head turned and he surveyed with dreadful anticipation the shining instruments laid out in readiness; needles, wickedly pointed; razor-sharp blades; probes to seek relentlessly for jagged nerves. Shuddering, he looked away, only to see the final, barbaric refinement of cruelty - over the chair a mirror had been hung, reflecting now his own apprehensive eyes; all too soon it would show him in graphic detail exactly what was being done to him. In this place of shining metal and glass and leather, Human flesh and blood seemed suddenly very fragile. A hand touched his shoulder, pushing him back so that he lay half-reclining; a head moved into sight, mercifully blocking his view of the mirror; cold grey eyes looked impersonally into his.

"Now," said the Technician, calmly, "it begins."

* * *

The needles first, sinking deep into cringing flesh, not in themselves intolerable, but holding the promise of pain and terror to come; then other, nameless instruments, probing, twisting, tearing until only the most supreme effort of will held him still and silent. Beneath his hands the leather of the chair was worn smooth and shining by the convulsive grip of previous victims; others had survived this, so could he - but nothing had prepared him for the indignity, the humiliation of the pain those skilful hands inflicted.

He thought that his suffering only confirmed the conclusion that the survey team had reached - this planet was ripe for first contact. Advanced though its people were in many ways, this hideous survival from a more primitive age argued forcefully that the teaching of the Federation was needed to banish the Ordeal from the lives of its citizens.

There was a moment's respite as the Technician paused to confer with the Attendant who assisted him; all too soon the brief consultation was over, and his tormentor resumed the merciless probing, shredding nerves already strained almost beyond endurance; with humiliation he felt tears sting his eyes, tasted blood in his mouth, and dug his nails savagely into the palms of his hands - anything to keep himself from breaking down, from betraying himself and his friends.

His friends! Think of them, he told himself firmly; think of Bones and Spock, waiting there in an agony of apprehension. They depend on you, they trust you - you can't let them down now! They understood and shared his dread, and their own suffering would be no less than his as their imaginations lived every second of exquisite torment with him. How much longer would this Ordeal last? Surely it must be almost over?

The Technician leaned closer; in his hands... something... reflected the bright glare of the overhead lights; the waves of sick pain crashed to an intolerable level, tearing him apart... it was no use, he could hold on no longer... "I'm... sorry..." he managed to whisper; then consciousness finally, mercifully, fled.

* * *

In the drab, green room McCoy paced restlessly, fighting the urge to barge through that ominous door, to find Jim, to... to what? Snatch him away, somehow end the pain? He could try that, and in the attempt betray their identities and their mission. The Technician had him now, and he must wait; even if he got Jim away, his broken wrist would render him powerless to help his friend; and if the Technician got one look at his drugs and instruments, he would surely become suspicious, might even recognise them for what they

were, aliens in this place. But to let Jim suffer God alone knew what barbaric indignities... The quiet voice broke in on his thoughts.

"Doctor, this restlessness serves no useful purpose. You would do better to remain calm - Jim will need you when... when this is over. Try to be patient."

"Patient! Like you, I suppose!" McCoy snorted. "Don't you understand... don't you know what they're doing to Jim in there?" He broke off abruptly as a dreadful suspicion occurred to him; Spock's voice had held a familiar note.

"You're linked!" he said accusingly.

"Yes, Doctor." Spock's voice was the merest thread of sound.

"But Jim expressly forbade..."

"I had to disobey; I could no longer bear... his suffering. He does not know - he will believe he fainted - but I felt... his pain, his fear. He will survive this without speaking - that is all that matters; do not... shame him... by telling him of the link; he was... so tired, so ill..."

"So are you, Spock." McCoy touched the Vulcan's shoulder; the velvet-dark eyes reflected all too clearly the pain of the Ordeal, and he could feel the very slight trembling in Spock's body that betrayed the strain he was feeling.

"I did not believe," the deep voice went on, "that such... barbaric practices still existed."

"We can't blame these people, Spock," McCoy commented sadly. "It's their way, they don't know any better... perhaps one day..." He straightened, resumed his aimless pacing. "Oh God, how much longer!" he burst out.

Silence. He looked across at Spock, saw the Vulcan suddenly slump in his chair, his hands covering his face.

"Spock!" McCoy bent over the motionless figure. "What's wrong?"

Slowly the tense hands dropped; the dark eyes gazed into his, alight with unconcealed relief.

"It... is over," Spock said simply.

* * *

The opening door brought both men to their feet, tense, expectant. The Technician entered first, followed by an Attendant bearing Kirk's unconscious body in his arms. As they started forward the Technician said,

"Your friend is in shock; he will recover shortly."

He motioned to the Attendant, who laid Kirk on a couch; a moment later the three men were alone.

* * *

Kirk awoke slowly; his first thought was instant recognition of the strong arms that held him comfortingly, his second, that the searing agony had subsided to a dull ache that was fading even now. He opened heavy eyes to see the two dear, familiar faces gazing down anxiously.

"Spock! Bones! What happened?" he asked weakly.

"You fainted, Jim," McCoy's voice answered. "Don't worry, it's over." He shot the contents of a hypo into Kirk's arm. "Just something to help you get on your feet again - we've got to get back to the pick-up point, and we have some rough going ahead. Jim, I'm sorry I couldn't give you anything to help you through this, but you know the risk; if you'd relaxed under the drug you might have let something slip..."

"It's all right, Bones. I understand." Kirk grinned with affection - McCoy had been so worried. And Spock? Kirk knew him well enough to sense his concern. He met the dark eyes reassuringly.

"I feel fine now," he said. "But Spock - I didn't betray us, did I?" He could not conceal the anxiety in his voice, the fear that he might have said something while unconscious that would have revealed who and what they were.

"No, Jim, you did not; the Technician suspects nothing - as far as he knows, you were just another victim of his instruments of torture."

Thankfully Kirk relaxed, resting his head against Spock's shoulders, allowing himself the luxury of this comfort while McCoy's drug took effect. At last he raised his head.

"Come on, let's get out of here," he said, looking back with a shudder at the firmly-closed door. "Let's go home."

As they retraced their steps McCoy stopped abruptly, pulling Kirk round to face him.

"Before we leave, I've got just one thing to say to you, Captain James T. Kirk," he growled.

"What's that, Bones?"

"Next time you decide to go tearing off on this sort of mission, for Pete's sake make sure your medical checks have been completed first - an abscessed tooth's no joke on a planet where the practice of dentistry is still in its infancy!"

THE CHOICE IS MADE by Sheila Clark

Five hundred pounds...

The weight of three grown men.

This place is inhospitable -

Those left behind will surely die.

Three to die that four may live...

Which three? When Boma said

"Draw lots" - the thought appealed,

For then the choice would not be mine.

But Jim would not allow himself

The luxury of dodging the decision -

Nor then must I. The choice

Has to be mine.

Five hundred pounds...three men...

The woman is too light; so too

Is Mr. Gaetano. Mr. Scott

is needed on the ship, and so must get

The chance to go. Dr. McCoy

Is likewise needed; his subordinates

Though good, lack his proficiency.

That only leaves

Boma and Latimer - and I myself.

Logic provides the answer;

The choice is made.

Spock's philosophy - to err is Human; to cover it up is, too.

BABEL SCENE by Janet Quarton

"Captain... Captain!"

There was no reply to Spock's urgent call; only a faint empty crackle from the intercom.

Spock's logical mind immediately assessed the facts. The Captain had been attacked; since he was now failing to respond he must be injured, perhaps severely. There was also his order...

"Take over, Mr. Chekov. Lt. Uhura, order security and medical teams to deck five, beside the Captain's quarters." The last word was almost lost as the elevator doors slid shut behind him.

Spock left the elevator at a run as he saw the Captain lying on the deck. As he approached Kirk, he saw the Andorian lying just beyond the Captain; a wicked-looking knife lay on the deck beside him. Thelev began to stir and Spock, concluding that the Andorian must be Kirk's attacker, hesitated only a second before giving the alien a nerve pinch to make sure he remained where he was.

Kirk was lying on his back; his whole body seemed to be numb now and he had no strength left. He had been sinking into the warm darkness when he recognised Spock's footsteps approaching and now he was desperately fighting to retain consciousness.

Spock knelt beside the Captain and Kirk, sensing the Vulcan's presence, opened his eyes and tried to sit up. He only succeeded in breaking into a fit of coughing which caused an unbearable pain in his back.

Spock, concerned, slipped his arm under Kirk's back and eased him up gently, trying to help. He fought to mask his alarm as he felt warm blood soaking into his sleeve as Kirk coughed.

The coughing fit ceased and Kirk lay back heavily on Spock's arm gasping with pain. He tasted blood in his mouth and couldn't hide a momentary stab of fear. Spock saw the flash of fear in Kirk's eyes and sensed his need for reassurance. With his free hand he brushed the lock of stray hair back from the Captain's damp brow.

"Take it easy, Jim," he said gently. "McCoy will be here in a minute."

Kirk looked up into the Vulcan's face and his fear vanished. He felt warm and safe in his friend's arms and allowed the darkness to close over him. Spock continued to support the unconscious body and could no longer hide his concern as he looked down at the pale, sweat-covered face, and noted how fast and shallow Kirk's breathing was. He heard footsteps approaching rapidly and adjusted his features into an impassive mask before looking round to see McCoy, closely followed by two orderlies with a stretcher trolley, appear round the bend of the corridor.

McCoy ran straight to Spock and Kirk, noting with alarm the blood on the deck.

"What happened?" McCoy ran his scanner over the unconscious body in Spock's arms even as he spoke.

Spock shook his head. "Uncertain," he replied. "The Captain reported that he had been attacked. I found him here, his assailant - I presume - is still unconscious. I know nothing more."

"Hmmm." McCoy made a face. "It's a nasty wound. Help me get him on the trolley."

Together they lifted Kirk and put him onto the stretcher trolley. Spock ignored his bloodstained hand and sleeve as he straightened up.

"I will join you as soon as the prisoner is in custody," he stated.

Running footsteps heralded the tardy arrival of the security squad. Spock made a mental note to query the cause of the delay; granted the men had further to come than either he or McCoy, but even so they should have arrived more quickly.

He ordered the Andorian to be taken to the brig, then turned to follow McCoy.

Every instinct bade the Vulcan to hurry, but he forced control on himself and moved at a steady pace to sickbay. He paused at the door of the examination room to ensure that his face was properly expressionless before entering.

McCoy was fussing over Kirk who lay face down on the examination couch. The bloodstained shirt lay discarded on the floor. Spock moved over for a closer look.

The injury itself did not look too serious, being a cut perhaps an inch in length; but bright red blood was still welling from it. Christine Chapel arrived wheeling a transfusion unit; she spared not a glance for Spock as she fastened the tube to Kirk's arm; from this the Vulcan deduced that the injury was, in fact, extremely serious. He glanced at the panel above Kirk's head and saw, with concern, that some of the readings were rather low.

McCoy turned round at that instant and saw the flicker of concern on Spock's face. He didn't show that he'd seen it, but moved over to the Vulcan.

"I'm afraid this is going to take a while, Spock. Jim's lost a lot of blood but I think he'll make it O.K. I suggest you go and get cleaned up and I'll let you know when I've finished. There's nothing you can do here." McCoy spoke gently; he was in no mood to tease the Vulcan.

Spock looked down at himself and realised that he was rather bloodstained.

"Very well, Doctor. I will be in my quarters." Spock turned to go but paused at the door for one last look at the Captain before leaving. McCoy had already forgotten the Vulcan and was working over the Captain again.

DAYDREAM by T.G.Z.C.

There are so many stars out there;
And each could give life to another world -
And life intelligent.

There are so many worlds out there
That even if I lived a million years
I could not visit all.

There are so many other men
Who dream, like me, of going to the stars;
One day, I know they shall.

The Enterprise...

A home for many people
Who have the urge to travel
To see far worlds, new ways,
And other cultures; and a haven
For one, who cannot find
Acceptance any other place.

T.G.Z.C.

...PERCHANCE TO DREAM by Sheila Clark

Captain James T. Kirk did not particularly like Ensign Rev Harbi...and he did not know why.

It worried him.

Harbi had only joined the Enterprise a few days previously; he was courteous, obedient, efficient, punctual, tidy...there was nothing, nothing at all, that Kirk could put a finger on and say, "This is what's wrong."

Kirk had shipped annoying crewmen before this; men who had been less than fully competent, or who were lazy or careless - he usually managed to get rid of them fairly quickly - but he had never shipped one that he had completely disliked - until now. And there was no obvious reason why he should dislike the Dorian. The being was, perhaps, a little more extrovert than Kirk, personally, appreciated, but that was no reason to dislike him...nor was it any comfort to Kirk to learn that no-one in the crew liked Harbi. Not that he was actively disliked; he just wasn't liked. And that in itself was odd, too; every Dorian Kirk had ever known had been popular, liked by everybody aboard ship, without exception.

Kirk found himself wanting to punish - or at least reprimand - Harbi for any and every minor thing that he did; things that he would overlook in anyone else, at least until the new crewman found his feet and learned Kirk's ways. Realising this, Kirk was deliberately lenient with the Dorian, even when Spock mentioned to him that several of the crew had complained about the Dorian Service Medallion that Harbi wore.

This medallion had been annoying Kirk too, but knowing as he did how proud the Dorians were of their medallions, he had deliberately waited, hoping that once Harbi got over the first raptures of being entitled to one, he would wear it inside his shirt, as all the other Dorians Kirk had ever served with had done. The trouble with the medallion was that because the Dorians' optic system was different from the Human one, what they considered a thing of beauty was, to Humans, highly, very highly, psychedelic, and visually very disturbing, causing a condition that in extreme cases led to dizziness and loss of balance.

"Even I find Mr. Harbi's medallion disturbing," Spock said, having delivered the general complaint.

"I know," Kirk said. "I keep wanting to drag it off his neck. The trouble is, the thing's a status symbol."

"So I have heard," Spock commented. "But I have never before served with a Dorian. In what way is it significant?"

"Well, you know the Dorian system," Kirk replied. "Gravity only 85% of Earth normal. By Terran standards, Dorians are mostly far too weak to meet the physical requirements of Starfleet. The handful who are strong enough to get through a physical and eventually get onto a ship...they're regarded as something special. Once they're assigned to a ship, they get a Service Medallion from their government. This is Harbi's first assignment, so he's only just got his medallion. Of course he wants to show it off. I can understand that. But understanding doesn't make it any easier to live with. I probably would have spoken to him about it days ago, only I was scared of picking on him..."

Spock nodded. "I understand how you feel," he said, surprising Kirk considerably. "I do not like him - I find I am continually wanting to correct him unnecessarily, so much so that when I do have reason to correct him, I am reluctant to do so."

"I'm glad I'm not the only one," Kirk commented drily. "But I think I'll have to speak to Harbi now that there are complaints."

He sent for the Dorian, and when Harbi reported to him, he merely pointed out that since most of the crew were Humans, and Humans found the medallion disturbing,

it would be more courteous to his crewmates if he wore his medallion under his shirt, where most of his race did.

Harbi agreed to do this; but within twenty-four hours the complaints had started again. Harbi was again wearing his medallion in full view.

This time McCoy came to Kirk. "Jim, that medallion of Harbi's has got to go," he said. "Half of the crew are suffering from general dizziness and lack of concentration because of the crazy colour pattern on it. Even Spock's affected. And I couldn't give him a proper physical because of it. I kept seeing double. If you can't persuade him to keep it out of sight you'll have to confiscate it."

"I don't want to do anything that drastic," Kirk began reluctantly - more so because it was what he wanted to do.

"It's that or have no-one on the ship apart from Harbi working at full efficiency. The ones who aren't affected yet aren't affected simply because they haven't come into contact with Harbi yet. But they soon will. And as soon as they do... No, Jim, you'll have to stop him wearing it, and if the only way is to confiscate it..."

"I suppose you're right," Kirk said unhappily. "But he's going to feel that I'm picking on him. And he'll be right."

"You're not, Jim. You gave him a chance. He didn't take it. You have the rest of the crew to consider... Jim, if you liked him, would you hesitate?"

"No, I don't suppose I would... All right, Bones. I'll order him to stop wearing it, and warn him that if he disobeys this time, I'll confiscate it. I hope I don't have to."

The warning was sufficient, however. Harbi stopped wearing the medallion, at least where it could be seen, but Kirk sensed that the Dorian was resentful. On the surface he was still the same courteous, efficient, obedient officer; on the surface, there was no sign that Harbi knew he was disliked, especially by his Captain; but Kirk felt sure that he knew...and returned the dislike with outright hatred.

It would have afforded him no gratification to know that he was right.

Kirk was definitely right.

Harbi did not like the Captain. But then, Harbi didn't like anyone.

He had always been regarded as unusual on Dor; he had grown up knowing that everyone expected him to join Starfleet Command because he was so big and strong. he was pleased that he was big enough and strong enough to be accepted - yet paradoxically he resented it, resented the assumption that so many of his race made, his family among them, that only the big and strong Dorians should be of value to the Federation. (No-one else in the Federation made this assumption; there were many things Dor produced that the Federation valued, and there had been great advances in the treatment of psychiatric illnesses since Dor joined the Federation because of them. Only the Dorians themselves underestimated the many benefits they had given to the other races who were allied to them.)

No, Harbi didn't like anyone - his defiance in continuing to wear the medallion, the one disobedience he had allowed himself, and that only because it hadn't been a direct order, had been symbolic of it - but Kirk he now hated, as the symbol of the detested Federation that decreed that his younger brother, who would have given anything to be entitled to wear the medallion but who was too slightly built to pass the preliminary medical examination, should be useless to the Federation. He himself didn't want the hated symbol of strength, but he found he bitterly resented not being allowed to show it off.

He began to wonder how he could be revenged on Kirk...and suddenly realised that he had an innate weapon that he could use, without anyone being any the

wiser. The fact that Kirk himself wouldn't know who was causing him distress didn't matter; all that mattered was the fact of being able to distress Kirk - and gain personal pleasure at the same time.

For Dorians were unique in that they had developed from a parasitic life-form. They had existed on the emotions of the other life-forms on Dor, preferring the more pleasant emotions, and had developed intelligence as they sought to cause pleasant emotions in their hosts. Although Kirk didn't know it, it was one reason why all the other Dorians he had known had been so well liked; they had provided a telepathic aura of happiness, which had provided them with feedback to satisfy their now rudimentary parasitic cravings. No-one suffered, everyone was happy, and no-one was any the wiser. It was also the reason why Dorian treatment for psychiatric disorders was so successful; but they had never seen any reason to mention their ability to the Federation.

But Harbi was not a normal Dorian.

Unlike most of his fellows, Harbi was capable of resentment.

Harbi was a throwback - and a throwback of the worst kind. The emotion he preferred to feel in others was unhappiness. The aura he projected was one of dislike. For a parasite it was anti-survival, and most of his kind had died out long before the race had gained intelligence. It was rarely that a Dorian like Harbi was born.

On Dor, he had been cunning enough to hide his aberration; here, he saw no need to. And since it was a telepathic condition, it didn't show up on any of his personality profiles. Since he came on board, he had been feasting on dislike, unhappiness and disorientation. And he had now been forbidden to wear the medallion that had given him much parasitic food - a double reason for resentment.

But he could replace what he had lost, from Kirk. He could make Kirk miserable.

He watched the Captain carefully for several days before insinuating a parasitic thread of thought into Kirk's mind. He saw Kirk's deep affection for Spock and McCoy; and decided that he could cause Kirk great distress if he could somehow alienate him from them...preferably one at a time. And he would feed fat from that distress.

He knew the theory of the ancient technique, no longer commonly used - no longer considered necessary - of causing dreams in the host; and began to experiment with that technique.

He probed Kirk's memories carefully, searching for one that he could use. He knew he couldn't create dreams for Kirk - not yet. He had to gain experience in controlling his host's mind first, and the way to do that was to take memories and manipulate them.

The surface memories were all pleasant ones, and Harbi's nose wrinkled as he experienced them, finding them sickly to his depraved tastes. Memories of laughter, of friendship; memories of assistance in times of danger; memories of a look or a word or even a touch exchanged, a rapport greater than even Harbi's parasitic mind could appreciate. And worst of all to Harbi's warped mind was love...Kirk's love for his friends, his certainty that they loved him in return - even the Vulcan from whom Harbi had been able to obtain very little reaction.

There was nothing that he could use! Even the more unpleasant memories were smothered in a thick layer of suffocating gratitude for help received...

Wait, though...wait...could he use some of them? There was one...the help given had been so little...could he use it? He probed the memory, absorbing all the details...

Then recalled it to Kirk's sleeping consciousness that night. He watched, standing in the background of Kirk's mind, absorbing Kirk's emotions...

It was a beautiful planet. Gravity, temperature, atmosphere, all perfect,

with no seasonal fluctuations anywhere - eternal summer. Then a flower, a beautiful large flower, fired a cluster of darts at one of the landing party, and he fell dead. McCoy bent over him...he could do nothing. Kirk glanced round. There were more of the flowers...but none near enough to do any damage. Then Spock came up behind him - and deliberately pushed him towards one of the flowers. Still off-balance he tried to get away from it, and failed. He felt the darts hit him, like so many stabs of fire, and fell, unable to move, unable to speak... Still conscious, he heard McCoy say, "He's dead", and Spock's reply, a mocking, "We're well rid of him". McCoy laughed too; and they walked away together and left him lying there, still alive but unable to show it... Long tendrils snaked out from the plant then, fastening themselves round him...he felt them sucking the blood from him, pulling tiny pieces of flesh from him and knew that the flower, so beautiful to look at, was eating him alive... He threshed about, trying to get away from it, but knowing that for all his efforts he wasn't moving an inch...

Full-fed, Harbi allowed the dream, an amalgam of an actual experience and a preliminary attempt at actual dream creation, to fade, but remained watching, probing for another memory he could use, another memory he could manipulate as easily... Odd that it had been so easy after all, but of course it had been a simple memory, nothing complicated... Ah, there was another one...

The survivors of the escaping band of genetic giants faced the crew of the Enterprise, who had proved unable to stop them.

"You can join us," Khan said. "We need servants...as our slaves, you will be permitted to live... But you, Mr. Spock - we would be glad to have you join with us as an equal. You are our equal, much superior to these puny creatures that Earthmen have become since they overthrew us by their treachery. Will you join us?"

"Yes," Spock said clearly. "You are by far a better leader than Kirk... You do not want Kirk, Khan. Let me have the pleasure of destroying him. Otherwise, you will be eternally in danger from his trickery."

"Do what you will with him," Khan said. "He is yours."

Spock gripped his arm and dragged him out. Once outside, Kirk said, "That was a good act, Spock."

"Act?" Spock said mockingly. "It was no act, Kirk. Khan is your superior. I serve him now." He opened the door of the decompression chamber and forced Kirk in. The door slammed shut; the air pressure began to decrease... Kirk gasped for breath...gasped...gasped...and everything became black...

He opened his eyes to find himself in a space-suit, drifting in empty space. Where?... Nearby he could see the Enterprise. He struggled to reach her, trying to swim through the vacuum of space, and finding that he could. He only had air for such a little while now... He had to get to the Enterprise...

He reached out to touch the ship, and found that his hand went through her. He pushed his way through the hull, and moved down the corridor.

The bridge... He had to get to the bridge...and he was there, on the bridge, with no idea of how he got there. Spock was sitting in the command chair, McCoy at his side, and Scotty nearby.

They saw him, stared at him. He tried to call to them for help; Spock shook his head. "No, gentlemen, Kirk is dead. That is only a ghost. Forget about him. He is dead. Lost with the Defiant."

Desperately he tried to speak to Spock, to beg for the help that a corner of his mind knew Spock should give him, but he had not the breath to do it. He gasped for breath again, feeling his senses going, sinking into blackness...

He jerked into wakefulness, and sat up sharply. He looked around the familiar cabin and drew a deep, thankful breath. Only a dream... No, three dreams, but so vivid - and so wrong, so terribly wrong. Why had his subconscious mind

insisted on having Spock betray him, when he knew Spock had saved him each of those times? Deliberately, he thought over the actual incidents about which he had dreamed. Spock had pushed him away from the flower, taking the darts himself; Spock had risked everything to retrieve him alive; Spock had not sided with Khan but had defied him...

/He was worming his way into your confidence,/ a thought said, deep inside his head. /He wanted you to learn to trust him...so that he could betray you later./

"No!" he gasped aloud.

To distract himself, he glanced at the chronometer. Time to get up, to return to duty... He yawned, still sleepy, but hauled himself out of bed.

He found himself watching Spock cautiously from time to time during the day, and each time he forced his eyes away. He trusted Spock...of course he did! A few bad dreams couldn't alter that...if only that treacherous little thread of thought would stop remembering the mockery in Spock's voice during the dreams...

He went to bed early that night, hoping for a good sleep to make up for the lack of rest the night before. Harbi watched as he settled down.

He fell asleep quickly; he was very tired.

Which memory tonight? Harbi thought. That one? or that?...

Gary Mitchell's eyes gleamed silver as he looked at Kirk. "You always wanted me to think, didn't you, James? Well, I'm thinking now. You can't stop me, James; I'm stronger than you...you should be kneeling before me. I should be the Captain, not you..."

Spock moved into the line of Kirk's sight. He walked over to Mitchell's side. Then he turned to face Kirk.

His eyes also were gleaming silver!

"We're taking over this ship, Kirk," he said. "We're the rulers of the galaxy. We're stronger than any of you puny Earthmen... You wanted to leave us stranded on Delta Vega. But it's you who will be stranded there, Kirk, you and the rest of the weak insects that we could crush under our feet. We could survive down there; how long will you live?" And he laughed scornfully.

Somehow, without any transition, Kirk found himself on the surface of Delta Vega, several of the crew at his side. Facing him were Mitchell, Spock, McCoy, Scotty, all with their eyes gleaming unrecognisably. Then they were gone. They had been his friends, and they were gone...leaving him and the handful of the crew who had not been affected by the barrier to die a lingering death from starvation... He looked round the near-barren planet, seeing plants sprout miraculously; he glanced towards his crew - and found that they had mostly disappeared. Only one or two, all carrying tricorders, were left.

"Jimmy, boy!"

He whirled to face the remembered, the hated, voice. "Finnegan!"

"Do you think you can survive here now, Jimmy boy? You have to beat me first, you know - and you can't beat me, Jimmy. You never could. You never will."

Kirk lunged forward, wanting to batter Finnegan into unconsciousness, irrotated beyond bearing by the detested, gloating voice. He thought he had seen the last of Finnegan when the Irishman left Starfleet Academy; it seemed he had been wrong. And he had never envied the unfortunate Captain who had had to put up with Finnegan in his crew.

Finnegan danced backwards away from Kirk's threatening fists and round behind a rock. As Kirk followed him, he stopped. Finnegan was no longer alone. Spock stood beside him.

Kirk stopped dead. "Spock?"

Finnegan burst out laughing, a horrible mocking laugh that Kirk remembered only too well; it spelt humiliation for him, indicated that once again he had fallen victim to one of Finnegan's tricks; and this time, Spock laughed with him. He turned away, unwilling to let Finnegan see how hurt he was that Spock, Spock whom he had thought he could trust, should laugh with Finnegan at him; and knew that Finnegan was not fooled.

He turned to face a stone wall and whirled again.

Finnegan no longer stood there; Garth did, with Spock at his side. And Spock held an open communicator.

"Spock! No!"

"Yes, Kirk," Spock said coldly. "Lord Garth is the natural leader of the galaxy. He must be allowed to leave here, and take up his rightful place."

Kirk lunged at Spock, trying to stop him. With one hand, almost contemptuously, Spock held him off while he spoke into the communicator. "Spock to Enterprise. Two to beam up."

Scotty's voice spoke. "Queen to Queen's level three."

"Queen to King's level one," Spock said deliberately.

"Scotty! No! No!" Kirk screamed. "No!..."

"You did kill Ben Finney," Spock went on as if none of the previous exchange had happened. "You panicked, Kirk, never gave him a chance to leave the pod. You murdered Finney, Kirk. You murdered him. You murdered him. You murdered him..."

Kirk closed his eyes to shut out the sight of the accusing face. The voice slowly faded into silence; Kirk reopened his eyes.

He was lying on the floor of his cabin. A glance at the chronometer told him it was again morning.

He got to his feet, slowly dressed. He had never felt less like going on duty.

That night, he fought his tiredness, trying to stay awake as long as possible, afraid to sleep in case he dreamed again. He sat at his desk, trying to keep his mind occupied with paperwork, but his eyes drooped shut despite all his attempts to remain wakeful. At last he gave up, and staggered to bed, hoping against hope that this time he'd be tired enough to sleep without dreaming.

He faced Spock, a strip of leather in his hands, wondering how to use this weapon to best advantage. It seemed so unlikely a weapon!... And he didn't want to kill Spock...even though there was killing fury in the Vulcan's eyes. He was half conscious of McCoy at the side, beside T'Pol, watching. Spock lunged, getting the thong round Kirk's throat. He felt it tighten, and struggled for breath, unavailingly. He felt consciousness slip from him; as it did, he heard McCoy saying, "He'd dead. Well done, Spock."

The voice was truly congratulatory; Kirk knew that McCoy was offering a sincere comment. He felt his body being thrown into a pit; and heard the gathered Vulcans, McCoy with them, leaving. They weren't even bothering to take his body back to the Enterprise...

He struggled back to conscious thought to find himself lying on a bed - facing himself! He stared in horror at the face, so familiar from his mirror, as it looked down at him, a vicious expression on his face. Then it left him, and he lay, unable to move because of the restraints that held him.

Spock came in, to look down at him. "Spock! You must help me. I'm Captain Kirk. Janice Lester changed bodies with me..."

Spock's fingers on his face... "I believe you...but I believe we will be better with a change of Captain. She will depend on me more, since she has no experience...and she will not have the delusions of grandeur that you so often have... If you tell anyone that I admitted that you told the truth, I will say you are lying, Dr. Lester."

"I hate you, Captain."

Kirk's attention was drawn from his aching head to Spock's statement. Somewhere in the background Kevin Reilly was singing 'Kathleen' yet again... and still as badly.

So the ailment, whatever it was, had affected Spock too... and now he knew the truth. Spock hated him... He had hidden it cleverly, but the disease had betrayed him... He would know never to trust the Vulcan again.

He closed his eyes in misery, and when he opened them again, it was to look up at the roof of his cabin. It was morning again, and for the third night he had obtained no rest from his night's sleep...

Sitting in the command chair that day, he had a momentary impulse to confide in Spock. Despite the dreams, he still trusted Spock...he did, he told himself.

Inside his mind, Harbi sensed the thought with near panic. He mustn't allow Kirk to confide in anyone...but could he influence Kirk's waking mind? Really influence it, as opposed to putting stray thoughts into it?

/The dreams can't be wrong,/ the thought came subtly. /They can't be wrong. Why have there been so many of them if they are? Spock is just biding his time. He wants to be Captain. He must want to be Captain. If I tell him, he'll tell McCoy and get me declared unfit for duty...maybe even insane...never to command the Enterprise again...and then Spock would be Captain.../

He gave an involuntary shiver at the thought of losing the Enterprise.

"Are you all right, Jim?"

He glanced round. Spock was standing beside him, an expression of some concern on his face.

/It's a trick,/ the thought said. /He wants you to admit to feeling ill so that he can have you removed from duty. He's cunning.../

"I'm perfectly all right, Mr. Spock," Kirk said coldly, formally.

Rebuffed, hurt, Spock retreated into cold formality himself. "Very well, sir. I regret having bothered you unnecessarily." He returned to his station, and gave his attention to his sensors.

Kirk watched him for a moment. /I was right, wasn't I?/ the thought said. /If he had really cared, he wouldn't have gone back to duty so readily. You beat him this time./

From his place at the navigation console, Harbi glanced back at Spock. A new flavour had crept into the parasite's mind...he realised that he was getting some feedback from Spock as well as the now-permanent emotional feast he was getting from Kirk. This was wonderful... He had never been so well-fed, even as a child basking in the love and care of his parents, for that emotional aura had been the sickly-sweet one of affection, and he preferred the bitter one of hatred, fear and distrust, the tart one of hurt.

After Kirk went off duty, however, Spock made his way to sickbay to see McCoy.

"Well, Spock?" the doctor asked airily. "What can I do for you?"

"For me, Doctor, nothing...but I do not think the Captain is feeling well. He is looking tired. He claims to be feeling perfectly all right, but I am not convinced. I think you should give him an examination."

"Are you saying you think he's unfit for duty, Spock?"

"No, Doctor, I would not go so far. I do say that he is not looking well. I think he is tired; unnaturally so. And that unless something is done, he may then become unfit for duty. I think it is better to see to him before that stage is reached."

"I'll go and see him."

McCoy made his way to Kirk's quarters casually, as if he had nothing more important on his mind than a gossip. He pressed the buzzer at the door; and on hearing the invitation to enter, went in.

Kirk looked at him a little suspiciously. "Bones. Did Spock send you here?"

"Spock? Why should he? I just looked in for a chat."

"Oh. Sorry, Bones. I'm a bit edgy..."

"You're looking a bit tired too," McCoy said, privately shocked at how right Spock was.

"Oh, that. I'm not sleeping too well, that's all."

"Any idea why?" McCoy struggled to remain casual, half afraid that Kirk would resent so direct a question. After all, Spock must have asked, to know that Kirk claimed to be feeling all right.

Kirk shook his head. "No, not really. I've had a nightmare or two, that's all."

"Come on, Jim. You're coming to sickbay with me, and I'll give you a check over. Maybe all you need is a tonic."

The checkup proved that Kirk was surprisingly run down, and definitely underslept. McCoy gave him a shot and a couple of pills. "Take these when you go to bed tonight," he said, "and go early to bed. Then I want to see you again in the morning."

Kirk took them and left. He had no intention of taking the pills; he had no intention of going to sleep if he could possibly avoid it. He didn't want to spend another night dreaming about being betrayed by Spock...

He sat at his desk working, forcing his eyes to remain open. Harbi sent him sleep thoughts, but he fought them, not knowing what he fought. Eventually he could fight no longer, and slumped forward over his desk.

Joanna was on board the ship. She and McCoy were avoiding him... Well, he thought, they don't see much of each other... He was walking down the corridor when he heard laughter coming from sickbay. One of the voices was Spock's.

"It's better like this," he was saying. "We don't need Kirk."

We don't need Kirk.

We don't need Kirk.

WE DON'T NEED KIRK.

The voice echoed round and round in his head, the cruel laughter from McCoy and Joanna providing a background to it.

Suddenly Spock was standing before him. He was holding a whip. He struck out at Kirk with it; Kirk dodged and turned to flee. As he did, the lash caught him across the face; across the eyes. He tried to see where he was going, and couldn't...the lash had blinded him.

The ship seemed to have gone now. He was walking on a partly-yielding surface, one that dragged at his feet. He tripped and fell over a rock; he

rolled and came to rest against a larger rock, the impact winding him. He lay for a few moments gasping for breath, then tried to get up. His skin seemed to be adhering to the rock... He pulled himself away, and felt the pain as some of his skin tore away. His shoulder was beginning to ache too; somehow he had damaged it. He tried to move on. It was so hot; he would give anything for a drink. He tried to call out, but his throat was far too dry, and he could only creak. He heard rustling behind him, and turned; the rustling stopped, to be resumed to one side of him a few seconds later. He tried to ignore it, but kept wondering if the animals of this crazy world were as bloodthirsty as he had discovered the plants to be... He tripped and fell again.

Then he heard Spock's voice and knew that the Vulcan was somewhere near.

"Spock!" he croaked, and knew that he'd been heard.

"There's no-one here," Spock said clearly. "We might as well move on. He isn't here."

"Spock!" He tried to call again, but only a hoarse sound came.

Someone caught his arm in an unfriendly grip. "Mhlar spy!"

He was hustled along. Involuntarily he opened his eyes and found that he could see again. He was being forced towards a huge rock. He was made to stand with his back to it while his arms were tied by a rope that went round the back of the rock. Spock was standing there watching.

"Spock!" he cried desperately. Even yet, somehow the instinct to trust the Vulcan had not died completely.

His First Officer smiled cruelly at him, and picked up a bow. He fitted an arrow to it, took aim carefully, and fired.

The arrow pinned one shoulder.

Spock took another arrow, fired it. It pinned the other shoulder.

He took yet another. This one, Kirk was sure, would be through the heart. He closed his eyes. He didn't want to watch Spock killing him...

Nothing happened. He opened his eyes.

He was slumped over his desk, his neck stiff from his uncomfortable position.

He was washing when McCoy came in without buzzing. The doctor took one look at him and said accusingly, "Jim, you didn't take those sleeping pills."

"How did you know?"

"Because if you had, you'd still be out cold. Jim, I didn't give you them for fun. You need a good sleep. Either you promise to take those pills tonight or I come in and sedate you. Now make up your mind which it's to be."

Kirk looked at him from bloodshot eyes. Maybe, he thought, in a drugged sleep I won't have those nightmares. "All right," he said. "I'll take them tonight."

"Did you have another nightmare last night?" McCoy asked. Reluctantly, Kirk nodded.

"Jim, why not get Spock to meld with you, see if he can find out what's causing them?"

"NO!" Kirk rejected the idea with revulsion - Harbi's revulsion. "I'm not having anyone crawling around inside my skull, least of all Spock!"

"But Jim, you've been in mind-meld with Spock before, and you never minded - if you'll excuse the pun."

"Well, I mind now! I won't agree to it."

"All right, Jim, just forget it." He glanced at Kirk. "I think you should stay off duty today, and rest. Try to get some sleep."

"I'm perfectly fit and able to do my job," Kirk answered sharply.

"You're tired out and liable to make a mistake."

"Doctor, are you in league with Spock to declare me unfit?"

McCoy stared at him in amazement. "No," he said, "but if you go on the way you're doing, I will be declaring you unfit, temporarily at least, and I'll keep you in sickbay, under restraint if necessary, until you're fully rested."

He turned and left without another word. Kirk stared after him, aware that he had hurt McCoy by his attitude, not fully understanding his own behaviour himself.

In a corner of his mind, Harbi smiled, savouring the flavour of McCoy's hurt. It had a different taste to Spock's, for it was mixed with anger... delicious!

Somehow Kirk got through the day. He was desperately sleepy, and there was a terrible temptation to take the pills as he had promised and go to bed. Harbi was feeling hungry - the gluttonous hunger of the compulsive eater. Harbi had rapidly become addicted to the parasitism he had never dared indulge before. He projected sleep thoughts at Kirk. Sleep...sleep...

Kirk fought the temptation until mid-evening, ship's time; then he took the pills and lay down.

The pills weren't working! He had never been so wide awake. Restlessly, he got up again and made his way to the bridge. They were near Romulan space; soon it would be time to enter it in obedience to Starfleet's sealed order. They had to discover the secret of the Romulan clocking device.

Yes; there was the Romulan ship.

"You will beam over, Captain, with your First Officer."

The woman commander... Spock staring at her. "You should join us, Spock," she said seductively. "Your place is with us, your distant cousins... These Humans do not appreciate you as they should."

"I agree, Commander," Spock replied.

"This is a spy trip, is it not?" she asked.

"I do not know," Spock said. "But Kirk will know. He can be made to talk."

Kirk stared at Spock in horror. Romulan guards approached; he was seized and stripped, fastened to a wall. He twisted his head round to look at Spock. The Vulcan had picked up a whip and was approaching with it.

"I have tolerated you too long, Kirk," he said coldly, harshly. "I have supported your illogic too long. But now we shall see which of us is the stronger."

The whip lashed down across his back, with the full force of Vulcan strength cutting the skin. It fell again, again... Kirk bit his lip against the pain, struggling to remain silent. At last it stopped.

"Will you tell us, Kirk?" Spock's voice was cold, harsh, full of sadistic pleasure. With an effort Kirk shook his head.

The woman rapped out a sentence in Romulan; Kirk didn't understand what she said, although he felt that he should have done. The ropes fastening him were untied; he was dragged across the room to a table and thrown down onto it, roughly, on his back, the impact jarring all the whip cuts.

Four guards held his arms and legs; he closed his eyes for a moment to shut

out the expression on their faces, and felt the smoothness of the table change under his back to a rough uneven surface. He blinked his eyes open again.

The Romulan ship had vanished; in its place was an uninviting landscape. But one thing hadn't changed; Spock still stood there, whip raised; then he brought it down, full force, across Kirk's unprotected stomach.

He twisted in agony, tearing his lacerated back still further on the rough surface of the boulder on which he was lying.

"I wonder how long he can remain silent under this?" Spock said, calculatingly. Then he brought the whip down again. Again Kirk writhed, silent under the fire that shot through his body. The whip came down again...again... A tiny corner of his mind knew that ten lashes was the sentence; though when at last the whip ceased to fall, it felt like many more strokes than ten.

Harbi, watching, licked his lips delightedly, savouring the spicy tang of remembered agony. This was the best taste yet; better than hate, better than hurt, better than anger or fear. He wanted more...

"Will you tell us?" Spock's voice insisted. Kirk was beyond speaking. He dared not open his mouth for fear of losing the fragile control he had over his desire to scream...and scream...and scream...

The lash fell again...again...

Spock came out of his cabin as McCoy passed on his way to Kirk's quarters. "How is the Captain, Doctor?"

"I don't know yet, I'm just going in to see him now. He should still be asleep, though; I gave him a couple of extra-strong sleeping pills, should knock him out for about fifteen hours, and he promised to take them. You know, it's funny, Spock; he's...well, I gave him the pills the night before, and he didn't take them. He's badly underslept, and he seems to be fighting going to sleep or he'd have taken them. He admitted having one or two nightmares, but when I suggested that we should get you to meld with him to try to find out what's causing them, he refused point-blank. Didn't seem to want - " He broke off as an agonised scream, piercing for all that it was muffled by the closed door, came from Kirk's room. As one, they leaped for the door. McCoy pressed the button to open it; they went in.

Kirk was writhing on the bed, his face a twisted mask of agony, as he screamed...and screamed...

Spock reached him first, and gripped his arms roughly, shaking him. "Jim! Wake up! Jim!"

McCoy reached into his bag for a hypo. "He's too deeply doped by the sleeping pills to waken," he said. He pressed the hypo against Kirk's shoulder, and the Captain subsided from sleep into unconsciousness.

Harbi wrinkled his face in distaste at the honey-sweet taste of concern that reached him from their minds, and withdrew contact, maintaining only the tenuous link that held Kirk a helpless prisoner of his greed.

Spock and McCoy looked at each other. "If that's the extent of one of his nightmares, no wonder he's fighting sleep," Spock said quietly.

McCoy nodded. "What I don't understand is why he refused to let you meld with him. Could you trace the origins of the nightmares, as I suggested?"

"Probably...but if he is unwilling, he would fight my influence in his mind."

"Whether he fights it or not, Spock, you're going to have to do it," McCoy said slowly.

Spock nodded. "It does seem to be the only solution," he agreed reluctantly.

They looked at each other again, then, by mutual consent, sat down to wait for Kirk to regain consciousness.

Kirk lay quiet for a little while, but then he began to toss restlessly again. McCoy bent over him anxiously.

"What is it, Doctor?"

"I don't know, Spock. I just don't know. It's as if... Remember on Deneva? The people affected by the parasites showed strong reactions even when they were unconscious. He should be out cold after that shot I gave him; but he seems to be in the grip of a further nightmare..."

Spock reached out to touch Kirk's head; but before he could, Kirk's eyes opened. He stared up at them, pain and horror showing clearly in his eyes.

"It's all right, Jim," McCoy said soothingly. "You're awake now... That must have been some dream."

Kirk shuddered. "It was...pretty bad," he admitted. He became aware of Spock beside him and, almost without knowing he was doing it, he moved fractionally to get further away from the Vulcan.

Spock noticed the withdrawal, slight though it was, and moved away himself, his face wooden. McCoy noticed it too.

"Jim - what's wrong with you?"

"I - nothing, Bones."

"No? What was your dream about?"

"It was just...reliving one of my...my less pleasant memories," Kirk said hesitantly.

"Go on."

"I'd...rather not."

"And the rest of your nightmares?"

"Were much the same," he said unwillingly.

"All right, Jim. Now, there must be some reason for them; I said that already. The only way we can find out what's causing them is for Spock to mind-link with you."

"No!"

"He's prepared to do it," McCoy told him, Surely that was why Jim was refusing...his knowledge of how unpleasant it would be for Spock.

"No," Kirk said again. "I told you, Bones, I don't want anyone nosing around inside my skull."

McCoy glanced at Spock apologetically. "Jim, either you agree to it or I declare you medically unfit for duty, sedate you and have Spock do it anyway. It'll be more pleasant all round if you submit voluntarily."

Kirk stared at him, gauging the extent of his implacability. Then he sighed. "All right," he said. "Get on with it."

Spock came back almost reluctantly. He reached out to touch Kirk's face; and sent a tendril of thought into Kirk's mind.

At once he became aware of a stranger there, standing in a shadowed corner of Kirk's mind, watching. He moved towards the stranger, and found Kirk standing in his way, facing him.

"You must let me past, Jim," he said quietly.

"No!" Kirk gasped. "You want to get behind me, stab me in the back..."

Spock stared at him in amazement, amazement that lessened as he realised that he was holding a knife in his hand. Now where had that come from?

"You must let me past," he repeated. "I am not any danger to you, Jim. But he is." He nodded past Kirk to the shadowy stranger.

He tried to step past, tried to move round Kirk; but his Captain moved with him, turning to keep facing him, and the stranger moved too, keeping behind Kirk.

"Look behind you, Jim. There's your enemy - not me. Jim, I hate to remind you of it, but how often have I saved you in the past? Would I do that, then seek to stab you in the back now? Look behind you."

The inner struggle showed on Kirk's face. He wanted to trust Spock...so much, so very much...but that horrible little thread of thought still whispered inside his head, /He's tricking you...he hates you.../

With an effort, a terrible mind-wrenching effort, Kirk gasped, "Spock... help me!...help me!" He held out his hand. Spock gripped it, and pulled Kirk to his side, turning him to face the shadow.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The shadow moved slightly; a man-shape, its face a featureless mask, it was completely anonymous. Spock lifted the knife he was still holding and moved towards it.

"If you destroy me, you destroy Kirk," a hoarse, sighing, unidentifiable voice whispered. "If you destroy me here, you destroy his mind; if you do discover who I am and destroy my body, you destroy him just as effectively..." The figure thinned, became transparent, vanished.

Kirk became aware of McCoy standing there, watching anxiously, and realised that the doctor had heard none of the exchange. It had all been inside his head. Beside him, Spock said, "We were partly successful, Doctor. There was someone else inside the Captain's mind, influencing his thoughts... He is gone now, at least for the moment, but unless we can find out who it is and somehow disable him, he will re-enter - and continue to give the Captain nightmares, whatever his reason for so doing."

With some difficulty, Kirk said, "Spock... What I said about the dreams... They were all things that did happen...but he twisted them somehow, so that you ...you were the one trying to harm me..."

"Have you no idea of who it could be, Captain?" Spock asked briskly.

Kirk shook his head. "I didn't even know he was there, Spock... Bones, who on board, apart from Spock, is telepathic?"

McCoy shook his head. "No-one, as far as I know."

Kirk glanced at Spock, who also shook his head. "Anyone who is, is hiding the fact."

"If you melded with him, would you know?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Spock, I hate to ask it of you, but we have to find him. Even if it means you linking with everybody on the ship."

Spock nodded. "Yes, Captain."

"It isn't as bad as that," McCoy put in. "I think we can forget about the Humans on board; and we can forget about most of the aliens too. The ones to investigate are the aliens who joined the ship recently, and there are only one or two of them." He saw Kirk's puzzled look, and went on. "Don't you see, Jim? Your nightmares are so recent, it can't be anyone who's been on the ship for a while that's responsible, or they'd have started long ago."

"Yes," Spock said. "Of course. Now why didn't I think of that? However, Doctor, we can take the matter one step further; which of the new alien crew-members would have any cause to dislike the Captain enough to give him nightmares, nightmares in which I am the villain?"

"There's only one of them that I've had anything to do with yet," Kirk put in. "And possibly only the one that you've had anything to do with either."

They looked at each other. "Ensign Harbi?" Spock asked.

"You reported him to me, and I stopped him wearing his medallion. He would certainly resent that," Kirk replied. He glanced at McCoy. "Bones, what information have you on the Dorians? Are they telepathic?"

"If they are, it's never been reported," McCoy said.

"Let's find out." Kirk reached for the intercom. "Ensign Harbi, report immediately to the Captain's quarters."

Harbi, when he arrived, was the polite, courteous, non-obtrusive, unlikable officer they had come to expect him to be.

"Yes, sir," he asked.

Kirk nodded to Spock. "Ensign, will you permit Mr. Spock to mind-link with you?"

"For what purpose, sir?"

Kirk looked searchingly at him. "I think you know that, Ensign."

Harbi's face twisted with rage. He reached out with his mind; Kirk cried out as the Dorian's mind crashed into his with brutal force. Harbi glared defiantly at Spock. "If you try to hurt me, you kill the Captain," he gasped.

"We're wanting to help you," Spock said reasonably, quietly, gently, even though his mind was a seething mass of anxiety for Kirk's safety - for Kirk's very sanity. Kirk's only chance lay in not frightening Harbi. He reached out to touch the Dorian, even though his mind shrank from the black hatred he already sensed in the other's thoughts; and Kirk screamed again, in sudden agony, as Harbi sent a red-hot thought spiking through his brain.

Balked, Spock retreated slightly. He caught McCoy's eye, and moved sideways; Harbi turned with him, to keep facing him. Cautiously, McCoy moved the few steps that separated him from the Dorian, and thrust the hypo against his neck. Harbi gasped; Kirk screamed again; then the Ensign fell unconscious while Spock leaped forward to support the staggering Kirk, who reeled from the effect of the white-hot dagger-thrust in his mind. Kirk clutched at Spock, gasping, while the Vulcan projected soothing thoughts.

Meanwhile McCoy, leaving Kirk to Spock, bent over the Dorian, his diagnostic scanner busy. At last he straightened.

"Well, Bones?"

McCoy shook his head. "His brain waves are showing definite abnormalities, Jim. In my opinion, this man is insane."

Kirk shuddered again. "He's still affecting me," he said. "I can feel him; now that I know about him, I can definitely feel him."

Spock moved now, to touch Harbi's head. He concentrated; his face twisted with distaste as he felt the lust for unpleasant emotions that boiled in the Dorian's head. His eyes closed in the effort to separate Kirk from Harbi; then the Human cried out again as he felt the thread of thought pull out of his mind, hurting like a pulled tooth.

Spock glanced at McCoy. "You must kill him," he gasped. "Now, while he is unable to fight back. You must...or he will kill Jim..." His face showed

the strain of holding the link while talking.

McCoy said slowly, unwillingly, "Is it essential?"

"Yes.... His own people would say so.... This condition is dangerous and incurable...."

If Spock thought so, it had to be so. Unwilling but resigned, McCoy gave Harbi the appropriate shot. The Dorian's body went completely limp; Spock pulled his mind free at the last possible moment.

"I'll take his body to sickbay," McCoy said quietly. "Jim, you should try to get a proper sleep now. You should be all right."

Kirk nodded, with a weak smile. But after McCoy had gone, he turned to Spock. "Spock....can I ask you a favour?"

"Certainly, Captain."

"Harbi.... He is dead, isn't he?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Even so, I'm....afraid....to sleep - those nightmares were....pretty bad. Spock, would you meld with me again....so that I know you're there to help me?"

Spock reached out without replying to touch Kirk's face. Then he whispered, "Our minds are one...."

He sat on the edge of the bed, holding Kirk's hand. Kirk smiled as he closed his eyes. Spock concentrated.

Peace....

Tranquillity....

Comfort....

Kirk walked through the open meadow, relaxing in the peaceful atmosphere. Spock came forward to meet him, and without speaking turned to walk beside him. At the edge of the meadow they stopped and looked back at the beautiful panorama behind them. They smiled at each other; and together, they walked on.

Mrs Kirk: How was school today, Jim?

Jim Kirk: Oh, boring!

Mrs Kirk: Why was that, dear?

Jim Kirk: Well, Billy and I were busy talking about spaceships going at twice the speed of light, and Teacher made us go and count all her coloured beads again!

* * * * *

How does a sparrow get down from a rocket?

By s-parrowchute.

* * * * *

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,

Why are you so bright?

Do you burn petroleum,

Or is it electric light?

LOST AND FOUND by Valerio Piacentini

Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise was dead.

It was the source of a curious, rather bitter pride that so far he himself was the only one to recognise that fact. McCoy, had he known, would have argued - dead men do not reason clearly, function efficiently; but surely only the dead could exist in such a limbo of utter indifference? The problem might have intrigued him once, Kirk supposed vaguely, but somehow nothing seemed to penetrate the shell of isolation he had drawn round himself since... since Helotia.

As it always did, the thought of that name produced the now-familiar contraction of the mind, in which grief and guilt blended to the tearing pain he must somehow learn to live with now. He glanced round; the bridge was calm, working normally - he could safely leave. Slowly then, he stood up.

"You have the con, Mr. Sulu," he said steadily, and walked to the elevator without hearing the helmsman's acknowledgement.

The sanctuary of his quarters had never seemed so welcome, the familiar territory such a safe haven; but even here the reminders lingered, solid, tangible. No longer fighting the pain he leaned back in his chair and glanced around, permitting himself to remember.

Helotia. A simple diplomatic mission that had proved to be a trap. The Klingon commander had been waiting when he beamed down. The hopelessness of capture - he would not, could not, order the surrender of the Enterprise. The calm preparation for death. Then, Spock. Always, Spock. The frantic haste to escape. The Vulcan caught in the disruptor beam as he relayed his Captain's co-ordinates to the ship, caught just before he could reach safety. The last thing Kirk had seen was the tall figure slowly folding to the floor, the dark eyes closing as the scene faded.

Return to the Enterprise - and the hideous, the impossible order from Starfleet; leave orbit at once, do not attempt a rescue. He had argued, begged, pleaded - in vain. Finally, the triumphant, mocking message from Helotia; Spock was alive, in Klingon hands - he would not long remain so.

It had not been total abandonment; Starfleet's plans were laid, and could not be disrupted for one man. The Federation ships had returned in force, sweeping the planet free of Klingon influence. Too late.

"The Vulcan is dead," he had been told, flatly. There was no vengeance for Kirk; the commander, Kelath, had been recalled before the attack, and was not among the prisoners. There was not even a grave to visit, to make his final farewell; the body had been flung into one of the communal burial pits, and of what worth was one dead Vulcan, that anyone should trouble to record which?

Kirk had accepted his loss with an outward calmness that surprised his crew; only McCoy knew of the guilt that tormented him. It had come at last, Spock's life given for his. If only he had defied the Admiral, gone back... Spock would have done as much for him. So the circle of grief and guilt grew tighter, choking him.

But a Starship Captain cannot afford the luxury of grief; to hide his pain he had begun to build that shell of indifference, retreating layer by layer into a safe, secure refuge where nothing could intrude to hurt him again. His concern for his crew did not diminish, but it was an abstract idea now, no longer touching him deeply as it once had done. McCoy watched anxiously, knowing that the shell was too complete, too brittle - it would shatter one day, and Kirk's desolation would be terrible to witness. It was not even as though

Kirk withdrew completely into himself; he still mingled with his officers, joined in their conversation, even smiled occasionally; but the hazel eyes were dull and lifeless. Withdrawal would have been easier to handle, McCoy thought, but this deliberate... separation... allowed no contact at all.

However great one man's agony, the work of Starfleet had to go on; a new First Officer was assigned to the Enterprise, Commander Sheron, an Andorian. McCoy had dreaded his arrival, wondering how Kirk would react to seeing another in Spock's place; he did not react at all. He greeted Sheron with his sweet, remote smile, and thereafter treated him with the same distant courtesy that now marked all his relationships; all, save that with McCoy, and that too was altered. It was as though Kirk, blaming himself for Spock's death, was deliberately punishing himself by refusing to accept the comfort his friends tried to offer; it could not last, and McCoy waited, knowing that he must be there when that brittle shell broke at last, and Kirk was forced to face reality.

Now Kirk sat alone in his quarters, waiting patiently for his control to return. It would - it always did - but it was sometimes hard to push away those comforting, painful memories; it would be... so pleasant... to allow them full rein, to wander unchecked through the years he had shared with the Vulcan, years of companionship, utter trust, sometimes pain and fear - but always, always, complete understanding. Yet if he did so - if he gave way to that temptation - he would no longer be able to function as Captain of the Enterprise, for he would be compelled to recognise that Spock's life had been given for something that no longer mattered to him - his career. And it must matter, for if it did not, Spock would have died uselessly, and that, he could not have borne.

At last, as he had known it would, the raging pain subsided to the accustomed ache that was all that was left to him of feeling. He pulled his regained control carefully around himself again, wrapping himself deep in the protective mantle of routine. The door buzzer sounded, and he sighed.

"Come!" The single word came calmly.

For just an instant the sight of the blue shirt in the doorway lifted his heart: would it always do so? he wondered.

"Yes, Mr. Sheron?" he asked.

"A message from Starfleet, Captain - Priority Code."

The Andorian held out a sealed tape. Kirk rose and opened his safe, wondering idly what problem Starfleet had found for him now - something urgent, evidently, since they had employed a code to which only the Captain held the key. Taking the decoder from the safe, he bent to decipher the tape.

Sheron took advantage of his concentration to study his Captain interestedly; he still did not know what to make of Kirk. He had accepted assignment to the Enterprise eagerly, for the reputation of the ship, and of her Captain, made it an attractive posting for an ambitious officer.

Initially, however, he had been disturbed by Kirk's attitude. The man was always pleasant, always correct... but remote, formal, treating his First Officer with courtesy, but maintaining between them a distance the Andorian did not know how to cross. At first Sheron had wondered with dismay whether the Captain simply disliked working so closely with an alien, but observation quickly disproved that theory, for Kirk was exactly the same with his Human officers. Besides, surely he had heard that his predecessor, Spock, was also an alien - a Vulcan, wasn't he? Concluding that Kirk's reserve was natural to him, Sheron had given up trying to understand the man, and had settled for respecting the Captain; but he was troubled. His position was made much more difficult by Kirk's indifference, and although he could appreciate Kirk's reputation, it was impossible to understand the affection which the crew seemed

to feel for this remote, unemotional man.

While Kirk busied himself with the decoder Sharon glanced around with interest; he had never before been in Kirk's quarters, and he looked now for some clue to the private life of the man who had come to interest him. A jarring note struck him at once - while most of the furnishings and decorations in the room were Human, certain items here and there were clearly of Vulcan origin. On a small side table stood a chess board, a game half completed, awaiting the next move. He knew that Humans seldom played the complicated three-dimensional form of the game; an expert himself, he could tell that the opponents were well-matched, and he wondered who the Captain's opponent could be. Turning away with a regretful sigh, for his fingers itched to pick up a rook and make the next move, his eyes lighted upon an even more unusual object. On a shelf by the Captain's desk stood a Vulcan harp. A swift glance confirmed that the Captain was still busy, and Sharon edged forward for a better look. He had been right - the instrument was a priceless work of art, of the type usually jealously guarded by an accomplished musician; he would not have expected to find such a treasure in a Human's quarters. Attracted by its beauty, Sharon stretched out a tentative hand.

"Don't touch that!" Kirk's voice cracked like a whip. Startled, the Andorian turned to meet hazel eyes blazing with anger. Even as his amazement showed on his face, the Captain's eyes dropped.

"I'm sorry," he said in his usual remote tone. "I did not mean to speak so sharply... the harp is very delicate."

"I apologise, Captain," Sharon returned stiffly. "I meant no offence."

"Forget it." Kirk made an abrupt gesture of dismissal, was again the efficient, unemotional Captain. "We have work to do, Mr. Sharon. The tape orders us to Organia; I am ordered to place the Enterprise at the disposal of the Council. Please take the con - I'll be here for a while, then in sickbay if I'm wanted."

"Very well, Captain." More puzzled than ever, Sharon departed. This was the first sign of emotion he had ever seen from Kirk - and that he should display such anger over a triviality was strange indeed. As the elevator carried him to the bridge, Sharon made a mental note to discover what he could about the curious behaviour of his enigmatic Captain.

Behind him Kirk stared miserably at the closed door. He had not intended to offend the Andorian, he thought guiltily; but the sight of a stranger's hand reaching for the harp - Spock's harp - had aroused in him a fury of possessive anger, an irrational resentment that Sharon was here, taking the Vulcan's place.

When he had been notified of Sharon's appointment to the Enterprise Kirk had gone at once to Spock's quarters; no stranger would pry into his friend's life - he would pack his belongings himself, however much it hurt. There were tears in Kirk's eyes by the time his self-imposed task was completed, and he surveyed the pitifully small pile he had collected. Spare uniforms were the only clothing - Kirk reflected that, save when landing party duty demanded it, he had never seen Spock out of uniform. A few books - the titles had surprised and delighted him - he had always known that beneath the Vulcan shell the Human Spock still dreamed in secret. The chess board, over which they had lingered for so many hours. The harp - pain stabbed deep as he recalled evenings of enchantment. He reached out, touched the strings lightly, and recoiled at the discordant murmur; it was a beautiful instrument, of great value, but worthless to him, for the man who had awakened its music would never do so again.

Kirk glanced round, and shivered; he had lowered the thermostat to normal ship's temperature, and only now did he realise how automatically he had adjusted to the warmth Spock found comfortable. Cradling the harp carefully,

Kirk carried it to his quarters, returning for the chess set, and the small case of books and clothes. The room's emptiness screamed at him; now he really knew that Spock was gone, and he left the room without a backward glance, for he carried with him all that would remain of his friend - those few possessions, and the memories that would always haunt him.

In his own quarters he stowed away the case, stood the harp by his desk, found a place for the chess board, carefully setting the pieces as they had been at the interruption of their last, unfinished game. It would probably be wiser to pack them away, he thought, but they were part of the life he had shared with the Vulcan, and to do so would seem as though he tried to deny his sorrow.

Now, vaguely disturbed into guilt at his treatment of Sheron, Kirk reached out, drew his fingers lightly down the curved neck of the harp, producing, as the gesture always did, a faint echo of Spock's presence. The Vulcan's strict sense of justice, which he had almost unconsciously acquired, told him how unfair he was being to his First Officer, but he somehow could not find the energy to get to know the man. Not yet, he silently begged that haunting presence; give me just a little longer, Spock.

The voyage to Organia was uneventful. With the Enterprise secure in orbit, Kirk called Sheron to the transporter room, and prepared to beam down. The Andorian obeyed eagerly - he had heard much of the powerful thought-creatures who inhabited this planet, and maintained an uneasy peace between the Federation and the Klingons, and was looking forward to his first encounter with them. Their first appearance was something of an anti-climax, however, as Kirk greeted three apparently undistinguished humanoids.

"Trefayne, Ayelborne, Claymare, may I present Mr. Sheron, First Officer of the Enterprise?" Kirk began.

"Captain Kirk, you are again welcome, as are you, Commander," replied the being Kirk had named Claymare. "But Captain, what of Mr. Spock? Surely he..."

"Spock is dead," Kirk replied harshly. "He was a prisoner of the Klingons."

"We grieve with you," Trefayne said softly. "A fine man - and a magnificent mind."

"Indeed. How may I serve you, gentlemen?"

It was obvious to Sheron that Kirk had deliberately turned the conversation, even at the risk of seeming discourteous. Did Kirk's strange attitude have something to do with his former First Officer? But he would have to postpone consideration of that theory - Ayelborne was speaking now.

"Have you ever heard of a Klingon commander named Kelath, Captain Kirk?"

"Kelath?" Kirk started violently, his eyes darkening. "He was in charge on Helotia when... What of him?"

"We have received reports from the planet Swire; it seems that Kelath has taken over there - the planet, though undeveloped, is rich in rare minerals - and is using the native population as slave labour. This must be stopped."

"Surely that's a breach of the peace treaty?" Kirk enquired.

"The matter is not so simple, Captain. According to the Klingon government, Kelath is a renegade, acting on his own initiative; they have disowned him. While we do not necessarily accept their denials, we do not at this time wish to provoke an open conflict with the Klingons. However, as they have denied all knowledge of Kelath's actions, they will not interfere if the Enterprise, acting with our authority, moves against him to free Swire."

"You mean you want the Enterprise to attack Kelath?" Kirk sounded more animated than Sheron had ever heard him.

"Not quite, Captain; Kelath controls three ships - formidable odds even for the Enterprise. No, we have devised an energy screen, which we will instal on your ship; it will nullify the Klingon disruptors, but will permit your phasers to operate. Kelath will be unable to defend Swire, and you will be able to capture his base. You will return the Klingon prisoners here. I suggest you advise the Federation to have relief ships standing by - the reports we have received indicate that the condition of the native labourers is grave, and medical teams will be urgently needed. For their protection, the energy screen can be transferred to the surface, where it will prevent any Klingon ship from entering orbit."

"What of Kelath?"

"We will deal with him, Captain - Mr. Spock's death will not go unpunished. When may we begin to instal the energy screen?"

"At once, if you wish. I'll call Mr. Scott now." Kirk pulled out his communicator.

Assuming a casual air, Sharon strolled into engineering. The man he sought was very much in evidence, loudly expressing his opinion of the Organian device he had been studying ever since it had been installed. As Sharon approached, Scotty looked up with a broad grin.

"Whit kin ah be daein' for you, laddie?" he asked.

"Are you busy, Scotty? I'd like a word with you if you can spare the time."

Scotty cast a critical glance around his department. "Aye, I could give ye a few minutes-- there's yon infernal Organian machine, but my boys will call me if anything happens. Come into the office."

He led the Andorian into the small room that served him as office, workshop, and, the crew suspected, very often sleeping quarters as well. "Have a seat." Snatching up a pile of blueprints, Scotty indicated the cleared chair, and perched on a corner of the cluttered desk. "Now then - what's the trouble?"

"No trouble, exactly, it's just... I need some advice, Scotty, and I don't know who else to ask. It's about the Captain..." He paused, unsure how to phrase his question.

"Is Jim giving you a hard time?" Scotty asked sympathetically.

"No, it's not as simple as that... What's wrong with him, Scotty? Or is it me? Ever since I came aboard, he's been... strange, so distant... it's almost as if I didn't exist. I can't talk to him, get close to him... I can't go on working so closely with a man who'll barely acknowledge my presence. What have I done to offend him?"

"Nothing, laddie." Scotty sighed. "He's just the same with all of us now - you must have seen that."

"I have," Sharon admitted, "and that's the thing that really puzzles me. I could understand it if he just didn't like aliens, but he managed to work with Commander Spock..."

"That's your answer, you know, Sharon - Spock."

"I don't understand."

"Look, it's this way," Scotty settled himself comfortably. "Being a Starship Captain - it's a lonely life; the responsibility, the decisions, always knowing that somebody's life might depend on every move you make. There's no-one to confide in, no-one to understand; then he met Spock. He was lonely too, in his own way - a half-breed Vulcan, isolated among Humans. They seemed to

hit it off right from the start - they were closer than brothers, understanding each other in a way no-one else could share. Then Spock was killed rescuing Jim from the Klingons, so Jim has got it into his head that it was his fault. He hasn't accepted his loss yet, or come to terms with his feelings of guilt. Don't think he doesn't appreciate you as First Officer, it's just that to him, you've taken Spock's place. Oh, he knows it's not your fault, but every time he sees you he remembers."

"I understand now," Sheron said quietly. "Such a friendship is very rare - it cannot be easily broken. Now that I know the reason for his attitude, I can work with him until he learns to adjust."

"I'm sure he'll come round in the end - just remember that he was badly hurt. No criticism of you, Sheron, but Spock was... something special, even I could see that. Look, why don't you consult his records? And you could try asking round, discreetly; you can often get a good picture of a man from those who served under him."

"I might try that, Scotty - thanks."

"My pleasure - and don't worry; Jim only needs some time."

Commander Sheron halted the tape running through his desk viewer, and sat back to consider what he had learned. Following Scotty's suggestion, he had mentioned Spock to some of the junior crew members, and had been somewhat startled at their enthusiastic response. Sulu and Chekov had painted an astonishingly vivid image of an efficient commander, a perfectionist who was endlessly patient in training his staff, remorseless with those who wasted his time. He had tested his juniors to the limit, but was unsparing of himself in helping them. From all sections of the ship had come the same attitude; even the hard-bitten security men, notoriously cynical about their superiors, had quite openly idolised the Vulcan. Shaking his head in bewilderment, Sheron had retired to his quarters, and pulled Spock's record tapes from the computer. The service details he vaguely knew already, but he scanned them anyway, refreshing his memory. Half Human, half Vulcan, Spock had served most of his time on the Enterprise, first under the command of Captain Pike, later under Captain Kirk. There was one unusual entry - Spock had turned down an offer of his own command, giving as his reason that he preferred to continue with his scientific duties. Sheron wondered about that - non-Human Captains were still a minority in Starfleet, and he would have expected a Vulcan to be ambitious.

The identification details showed on the screen now, and he studied them carefully. The impassive face was wholly Vulcan, betraying no evidence of his Human heritage; under delicate, winged eyebrows dark fathomless eyes challenged him, giving no clue to his predecessor's inner nature. Yet there must have been something about him to produce so much affection in his fellow-officers - normal Vulcan reserve might have brought him respect, but surely not the devoted friendship of men like Kirk, McCoy and Scott.

Perhaps the clues he sought lay in the details of his service? Sheron reached out to re-start the tape when the intercom summoned him.

"Commander Sheron to the bridge," came Uhura's voice. "We are about to enter orbit around Swire."

"Acknowledged." Sheron snapped off the intercom and headed for the elevator.

"That's the last of the Klingons transported up, Mr. Sheron," the Security Chief reported. "The medical teams are hard-pressed - I've got every available man helping out. The relief ships are urgently needed."

"They're already on their way, Chief. Do you have Kelath safely in custody?"

"Yes, sir. He was the first one we beamed up. He's safely in the brig, and I've got two of my men on guard. I picked men who joined us after Helotia - the old hands were ready to take him apart."

"So I understand, Have you seen the Captain?"

"He's outside with Dr. McCoy, trying to organise things. I must get back - some of these poor devils are in a bad way."

"Right, Chief, carry on."

Sheron moved off in search of the Captain, mentally reviewing the events of the last few hours. Protected by the Organian energy screen the Enterprise had assumed orbit around Swire, and had been instantly challenged by the Klingon renegades. The response to Kirk's call for surrender was an attempted attack, but as had been promised none of the Klingon weapons functioned. Landing parties from the Enterprise had quickly taken over the base, and with Kelath in Federation hands the ships had no option but to surrender.

The problems really began when Kirk had to consider the plight of the labourers; the base was indeed a slave camp of the worst kind. The condition of the slaves was appalling - they had been half-starved, flogged, mercilessly overworked. What little Kirk could do, he did; medical teams were already at work, assisted by every man and woman who could be spared from the Enterprise. The most urgent cases were moved to a hut which had been set aside as a temporary hospital; for the others, food, water and warm blankets at least eased the worst of their misery. Most of the slaves had been chained to prevent any escape and Sheron, catching sight of a yellow-shirted figure across the compound, hurried to join him, steeling himself to ignore the pleading hands that were stretched out to him as he passed.

"Captain, the relief ships will be here in a few hours," he reported as he reached Kirk. "Dr. McCoy says that we should be able to save most of the slaves, though some are in a bad way - still, it's not as bad as he thought at first."

The dull hazel eyes turned to him listlessly. "I'm... glad of that."

"Mr. Chekov reports that there are a few Federation men among the slaves - it seems that the Klingons decided to put Starfleet prisoners to work. Kelath is - "

A hiss of pain from the Captain interrupted him. "Don't mention him! I don't want to see him, hear about him, think about him! Just arrange for him to be sent to Organia as soon as the relief ships get here."

"But, Captain, you should question him... "

"How much do you think I can take, Mr. Sheron? He's cost me... too much already. If I see him, I'll..." Kirk turned away quickly, trying to recover his composure. Sheron stood uncomfortably, unsure how to react; after a moment Kirk turned to face him. "Come on, let's go and do what we can to help Bones."

He began to move away, but something hindered him. Glancing down he saw that one of the slaves who had been chained to the compound wall near where he stood had crawled forward to the fullest extent of his chain; his outstretched fingers closed frantically around Kirk's ankle.

With a faint sigh Kirk knelt, gently loosening the clutching fingers. "It's all right," he said quietly. "You will be free soon."

"Jim... Help me..." It was the merest thread of sound, but Kirk shuddered convulsively. He could not see the slave's face, for in his weakness the man could not even raise his head; long dark hair trailed in the dust, the hand that gripped so tightly was slim, long-fingered, hauntingly familiar; across the man's back the welts of a merciless flogging showed green.

Green?

It was then that Commander Sharon received the shock of his life; his Captain, the reserved, dignified James Kirk, kneeling in the filth and mud of the compound, gave a sudden muffled cry, and gathered the stranger into his arms. His face shone with a mixture of anguish and delight, and he seemed totally unaware of the tears that poured down his face.

"Get McCoy!" The words were hurled over his shoulder at the astonished Andorian; Sharon fled.

In response to the Doctor's irritable enquiry, Sharon could only repeat the Captain's summons; what exactly had happened, or why, he was at a loss to explain. Grumbling under his breath McCoy nevertheless followed the Andorian back to where Kirk still knelt, his head bowed over the motionless figure in his arms.

"Jim, you can't pull me away at a moment's notice," McCoy was already protesting as he approached. "We'll get round to everyone in time - I just don't have the facilities..." His voice faded as the Captain raised his head. McCoy gasped in astonishment at Kirk's once-immaculate shirt, rumpled now and stained with blood and dust; then at his eyes, vividly alive for the first time in months, glowing with hope, with joy, and a terrible apprehension.

"Bones... help him," Kirk pleaded.

"Yes, Jim, I'll see to it." McCoy's voice was calm, soothing - had the shock of the slave camp, the reaction to Kelath's capture, broken Kirk's shell at last?

"No, Bones, you don't understand... look."

At though he touched something infinitely precious Kirk brushed back the slave's filthy, matted hair with exquisite gentleness, revealing under the dirt and blood the delicate curve of a pointed ear, a white, set face cradled against his shoulder.

McCoy stood motionless; to the confused Sharon it seemed as though he too had been struck by the same madness that had affected Kirk, for when he moved at last it was to join Kirk on his knees beside the silent figure.

"Jim... oh, Jim... It is... it really is... Spock," he stammered.

Kirk nodded, unable to speak for the delighted grin that spread across his face at this confirmation of his instinctive recognition.

"But how...? Of course, the Starfleet prisoners. Kelath told you he was dead, but he'd sent him here, to torture him." McCoy leaned forward, professional concern replacing his delight as he realised the state of the Vulcan's injuries. "Jim, we must get him back to the ship."

Kirk nodded again, and gathered the Vulcan closer, but as he tried to rise to his feet he was hindered by the chain that secured the prisoner. He glanced in appeal at McCoy, but the Doctor was unarmed, and Kirk would not release his hold. Sharon, stirred into action at last, drew his phaser and severed the chain; Kirk's expressive eyes thanked him silently. Then, moving very carefully, he rose to his feet; even so, the movement must have hurt Spock, for he gave a quickly-suppressed gasp of pain, and Kirk's face tightened in anguish. Sharon stepped forward to help his Captain, but a swift gesture from McCoy halted him - this was Kirk's task. The Captain glanced once more at the Andorian, briefly, before returning his intent gaze to the man he held.

"You're in charge here, Mr. Sharon, until the relief ships arrive; see to everything for me, will you? I'll be in sickbay if you want me."

McCoy had already alerted Kyle in the transporter room; Kirk had barely finished speaking when the familiar shimmer pulled the three men away.

It was several hours before Sheron was able to return to the Enterprise. The relief ships had arrived at last, and proper arrangements were made for the care of the freed slaves. The Klingon prisoners had been turned over to one of the fastest ships for transfer to Organia; that was one responsibility Sheron was glad to be rid of - with so many security men busy on the surface, he had been afraid that Kelath might risk everything in a bid to escape. The Enterprise herself had been ordered to the nearest Starfleet hospital with the most seriously injured slaves and the freed Federation prisoners.

Heading directly for the bridge, Sheron handed over command to Scott and relayed his orders. He thought longingly of his quarters, and sleep, but supposed he ought first to report to the Captain. An inquiry produced the information that Kirk was still in sickbay.

The isolation ward was dimly lit, apart from a soft light over the bed; as he stood hesitantly at the door, Sheron knew he must be invisible to the two men who waited so patiently.

Kirk sat by the bed, both hands clasping one of Spock's, his eyes fixed steadily on the pale face on the pillow; across the bed McCoy studied the diagnostic scanners intently. After a moment the Doctor gave a long sigh of pure relief; Kirk raised his head, and the two men exchanged grins of delight.

"He's going to make it, Jim." McCoy's voice was faintly husky. "He's been starved, flogged... yet that pig-headed Vulcan stubbornness wouldn't let him give up. He's going to be pretty weak for a while, but there's no lasting damage."

Kirk's sigh of relief echoed McCoy's; slowly, with unutterable weariness, his head dropped to rest on his outstretched arm, his whole body trembling with the relief of tension. McCoy touched his shoulder compassionately, his free hand reaching out and, with the same delicate care Kirk had shown, he brushed back Spock's night-black hair, still untrimmed, but clean now, and shining. The three figures might have been carved from stone, frozen in position, united in a circle that was complete, perfect at last. The aura of joy and relief and love flowing from them formed a barrier Sheron knew he had no right to pass - he was not wanted or needed here. With a feeling of utter loneliness the Andorian left silently, and headed for his quarters.

The following morning Sheron returned to duty to find that the incredible Enterprise grapevine had been hard at work; everyone on board had heard of Commander Spock's return to the ship, and wherever he went excited groups of crewmembers were discussing the implications of that fact. Gradually, those implications began to dawn on Sheron himself.

He had come to realise, if not to understand, the bond his Captain shared with the Vulcan, but until now it had not threatened his own position. A Kirk lost in his memories, haunted by his friend's death, yet still the efficient Captain - that man he could work with; a Kirk unexpectedly reunited with that friend could prove a dangerous adversary. Sheron was certain what Kirk would want, would move Heaven and Earth to achieve - Spock's reinstatement as First Officer of the Enterprise.

A smouldering resentment began to build in the Andorian as he began to appreciate the threat to his position. This assignment had won him envy and respect throughout Starfleet - he could imagine the subtle mockery if he were to be transferred so quickly; and worse - the damage to his prospects, for whatever reason was given for his transfer, there would always be those ready to believe that he had failed, had not measured up to the standard Kirk required. In all honesty, he had to admit that he was probably not Spock's equal, but he was confident of his own abilities; for a moment he found himself wishing that the Vulcan had died in that Klingon slave camp, but he suppressed the thought with shame, knowing how much the man had suffered.

Somewhat Sharon endured that long, miserable day, hiding his worry, managing to respond with feigned enthusiasm to the jubilation of the rest of the crew. No word came from Kirk, who still remained in sickbay, closeted with McCoy and Spock. Planning the next move? Sharon wondered miserably.

Considering this, trying to foresee Kirk's line of attack, Sharon was finishing a solitary meal when he saw McCoy sitting at another table with Nurse Chapel. That meant Kirk and Spock would be alone in the isolation ward. In normal circumstances the Andorian would have turned in revulsion from the thought of deliberately eavesdropping on his Captain, but fear for his own future occupied him to the exclusion of all else. He knew how highly Kirk was regarded by Starfleet Command; he had only to request it, and Sharon knew he would be transferred from the Enterprise. He could think of no defence, but hoped that he could learn from their conversation what they intended to do.

As he had hoped, the isolation ward was still dimly lit, as it had been on the previous evening; once again he could listen unseen to the conversation of its occupants.

Kirk and Spock were talking idly of events in the past as he arrived; after a moment silence fell, and Sharon took the opportunity to study his... rival... properly for the first time. Spock's shining hair had been trimmed and combed into the smooth style he remembered from the record tape; he was very pale, and the deep lines on his face showed how much he had endured during the months of his captivity. The velvet-dark eyes were fixed on Kirk's as the two men exchanged a long, affectionate, reminiscent look. The Andorian cringed in shame as he saw Spock's face at that moment, for gone was the cool serenity, the impassive calm the image on the tape had worn; his Human half was showing clearly now, a man unutterably weary, in pain, but relaxing gratefully in his friend's company.

Sharon instinctively knew that he must never betray knowledge of what he had seen - only to Jim Kirk would the Vulcan willingly have revealed that part of himself. He felt a sudden overwhelming pity for the man - Spock had not asked for what had happened to him, meant no harm - but he fought it down savagely; whether he intended it or not, the Vulcan was a threat to his career, a threat that must - somehow - be overcome. Suddenly he became aware that Kirk was speaking.

"How do I go about it, Spock?"

"About what, Jim?"

"Getting you back, of course. You belong here, on the Enterprise - you're my First Officer, you always will be - you promised me that. If I contact Starfleet..."

"No, Jim." Spock's voice, soft but inflexible, cut through Sharon's anger.

"What do you mean - 'No'?" came defensively from Kirk.

"You will not contact Starfleet. You know that I wish to remain with you... but not like this. We cannot consider only our own wishes - there is also Commander Sharon. You told me yourself, he is a brilliant First Officer; to be removed from his post without justification, to be transferred merely because his presence is inconvenient - think what that would do to his pride, and to his career. I will not permit you so to hurt a man who has done us no harm; and what is more, I will not permit you to disgrace yourself - and me - by such an unworthy action."

"But I can't lose you again," Kirk whispered.

"Listen to me, Jim; all those months you believed me dead, and you began to accept it. We have been granted a respite - we may not serve together, but our friendship will not end, we will meet sometimes..."

"But I'll be alone again - and so will you," Kirk said miserably. "Yes, when I thought you dead I had to learn to live with it... but knowing you're alive... Spock, you know how much your support has meant to me - don't ask me to give it up."

"I must," Spock countered with gentle firmness. "Don't you see - if we do this, if we wrong Commander Sheron so, we will cease to be the men we are. We have never used our friendship selfishly - if we do so now we will destroy it, more surely than death or separation could, for we will grow to despise what we see in each other. No, I must go... and you must never indicate to Commander Sheron, by word or look, that you would have it otherwise."

There was a long silence, then Kirk bowed his head in defeat. "You're right, of course," he said dully. "We could never live with ourselves if we harmed Sheron - and I see now that we would, whatever excuse I gave to be rid of him. So now I've got to accept that I found you only to lose you again."

"Not altogether, Jim; we will keep in touch, meet from time to time... perhaps even serve together again... one day." His voice was urgent with the need to comfort, to convince the Human.

"Perhaps." Kirk's reply was very faint, growing stronger as he continued. "So we'll do our duty, as we've always done it - what we want always comes last, doesn't it, Spock? But we still have a few days; once you've... gone, I'll try to accept Sheron - but until then, we can go on as before, can't we?"

"We can." The Vulcan's hand touched Kirk's shoulder lightly for a moment. "I don't think he would grudge us this."

Outside the door Sheron backed away quietly, his mind a turmoil of confusion. This was not the reaction he had anticipated; he had thought Kirk and Spock would be united in determination to remove him from his post. Certainly, that had been Kirk's original intention, but Sheron had seen for himself how quickly he had accepted the injustice of such an action.

To protect his pride, his career, and because they could not in honour do otherwise, they were prepared to face the parting of their ways yet again. Sheron felt... he was not quite sure how he felt; he only knew he had to be alone, to think. Turning, he collided heavily with a familiar figure - McCoy. The Doctor's face was stern, his blue eyes unreadable. Sheron wondered how long he had been there, how much he had heard. McCoy had been a stable, enduring part of that complex unity he had sensed the previous evening; he too would be affected by its disruption.

With an abrupt nod of dismissal McCoy brushed past him into the ward; Sheron saw Kirk and Spock turn at his step, welcome in their eyes, before he fled to the sanctuary of his quarters.

Despite his revised opinion of Kirk, Sheron could see no way out of the dilemma, and he slept at last to dream again of the conversation he had overheard. On the bridge next morning he was too occupied to think about it, but he was forcibly reminded when Kirk made a brief visit of inspection to the bridge. He spoke to Sheron with more animation than he had ever shown before and the Andorian knew that he was already trying to put into practice his resolve to accept the situation. After his departure Sheron overheard Sulu and Chekov discussing the Captain's improvement; they attributed it to Spock's recovery, and were pleased, but Sheron had seen the sorrow Kirk could not quite conceal, and his pity and admiration for the man steadily increased. When he was able to turn command over to Sulu, Sheron went back to his quarters, hoping to decide how best to handle the awkward situation that would undoubtedly arise when the crew realised that Spock would not remain with the Enterprise.

A tape lay on his desk, a personal message from his family, and he scanned it eagerly in an attempt to calm his mind. Andorians possessed a strong sense of family unity, and the warm messages in the tape did much to restore him. As he removed the tape from the viewer his eyes fell on another, Spock's record tape which he had removed a few minutes previously. Impelled by curiosity he replaced it in the viewer and switched on, watching intently as the details of Spock's service on the Enterprise unfolded before him.

Stark, official language, of course; but the truth came through with stunning clarity, the awareness of Kirk and Spock as a perfectly balanced team. Over and over again he saw it - the risks taken, the challenges accepted, the dangers faced, each for the other. So many times sanity, life itself, willingly offered, yet by some miracle the final sacrifice was avoided - until Helotia.

The tape ended there, with the huskiness in Kirk's voice as he recorded the capture of his First Officer, and Kelath's vindictive message, 'The Vulcan is dead'.

Automatically the tape switched off, and Sheron found himself trying again to think of some way to help. It was up to him, he realised; Kirk would take no action, he could remain on the Enterprise and somehow, eventually, Kirk would accept him. Yet if he remained the Captain would retire once more into that brittle shell of loneliness that had surrounded him for so long; Spock would continue his career elsewhere, but among strangers his warm humanity would be suffocated by the customary rigid Vulcan formality, for Sheron knew that only to Kirk, and perhaps to McCoy, had Spock ever revealed his Human heart. And if he allowed that sacrifice, Sheron himself would do them the wrong they had refused to do him. Yet, was there another way?

His eyes were irresistably drawn to the tape from his family; an idea formed, began to grow... and Sheron smiled in understanding.

The shifts had changed, he noticed with some surprise - he had not realised how much time had passed. At the door of the isolation ward he hesitated, then entered quietly. Across the room Nurse Chapel turned enquiringly; the patient in the bed was one of the freed prisoners - there was no sign of Spock. Muttering an apology Sheron backed out hastily, only to come face to face, for the second time, with Dr. McCoy.

"Can I help you, Mr. Sheron?" Clearly, McCoy was not in the most co-operative of moods.

"I was looking for the Captain - I thought he'd be with Mr. Spock," Sheron replied evenly.

"Now why...?" McCoy bit off the question, studying the Andorian closely. Whatever he saw apparently satisfied him, for after a moment he continued in a warmer tone, "Mr. Spock is much improved, and I needed the isolation ward for a more urgent case. As sickbay is already full, he is sharing the Captain's quarters temporarily. You'll find them both there."

"Thank you, Doctor."

As he halted outside Kirk's quarters Sheron wondered how they would receive him; in their eyes he was a barrier to their wish to serve together - surely they must resent him?

"Come!"

The Captain's voice answered the buzzer. Sheron entered and paused just inside the door. Commander Spock was lying propped up in a sickbay bed in the living area; Kirk perched beside him, the chessboard standing between them. Two pairs of eyes turned to him, Spock's veiled, unreadable, Kirk's expressing only mild curiosity.

"Forgive the intrusion, Captain, Commander; may I speak to you for a few moments?"

"Sit down, Sheron. What can I do for you?" Kirk's face and voice betrayed nothing of the tension he must have been feeling; had it not been for that overheard conversation, Sheron would never have suspected his distress.

"It is a... personal matter, Captain," he said when he again had Kirk's attention. "I wish to request a transfer from the Enterprise to a temporary posting on my home planet." He kept his gaze firmly on the floor, resolutely ignoring the suddenly stiffening figures of both men. "There has been a crisis in the affairs of my family, and my presence has been urgently requested."

"You... wish to leave the Enterprise?" Kirk's voice was dazed.

"Not wish, no; I have gained much valuable experience here. But on my planet family ties are very close. It would only be for a few months, Captain, and I regret giving you so little warning... I have already completed my application - it requires only your signature."

"I... see." Kirk was, in fact, thoroughly confused; he had resigned himself to the inevitability of losing Spock, was determinedly making the most of those last few days in his friend's company... then suddenly here was this Andorian calmly informing him that after all there was a chance for Spock to remain!

"But... why?" He was interrupted by a faint sigh of pure weariness from Spock; turning at once he lifted the chessboard away, and settled the unresisting Vulcan comfortably on the pillows. "Rest, Spock," he urged softly. "McCoy'll have my head if you overtire yourself... wait for me outside, Sheron, we'll settle this in the briefing room."

As the Andorian turned away Kirk thought he saw a fleeting expression of concern in his eyes, and he was puzzled; but there was time enough for explanations - Spock came first. He reached out to dim the light, and his hand was caught in Spock's.

"Jim, did you hear?" The Vulcan's voice was very low, but the weary eyes were alight with hope. "He wants to go... and that means... Oh, Jim, I can stay!"

"Yes, my friend, I heard." Kirk's fingers tightened reassuringly. "Leave it to me... and sleep now; I'll come back later."

He lingered for a moment, watching as Spock's breathing settled into the tranquil rhythm of sleep; it seemed to Kirk in the dim light that the Vulcan was almost smiling as he lay.

Outside in the corridor Sheron awaited him; in silence the two men headed for the briefing room. When the door had closed behind them Kirk turned to consider the Andorian through narrowed eyes.

"All right, Mr. Sheron," he said at last. "Let's have the truth - why the transfer request? Why now?"

"As I told you, Captain..."

"Come on, Sheron, I wasn't born yesterday. You're up to something - I'll stake a year's pay you haven't been called home - and I can easily check."

"That will not be necessary. As it happens, I did receive a message from home, but it contained no summons. I phrased my request as I did because it seemed the most acceptable way. May I speak frankly?"

"Please do." Kirk indicated a chair.

"Thank you. Captain, my service on the Enterprise has been most rewarding; in normal circumstances I would have chosen to remain - but we both know that the circumstances are not normal."

"Explain."

"I am trying to, but I do not wish to give offence. I am aware of the close friendship that exists between you and Commander Spock; it is natural that you should wish him to return, but I stand in the way. I am also aware that that friendship makes you a formidable team; Starfleet - indeed, the Federation as a whole - would be the poorer for its loss."

Yet I believe that I have given satisfaction as First Officer; it is logical to suppose that Starfleet will leave me here, and transfer Commander Spock. You will not request that I be moved, for you know it would reflect badly on my reputation; however, if I request a home posting on compassionate grounds, and you support it, there will be no problem - Commander Spock can return."

"But what of you? What of your career?"

"Captain, there will be other Starship postings for me. I am confident that I have earned a good report from you - I foresee no problem there."

"Sheron, I know I haven't been fair to you while you've been here - why are you doing this?"

"To be honest, because I wish to earn your friendship. Until now, Humans have always been something of a mystery to me. I have learned from you that men of different races can indeed meet as equals, that they wish to understand and can transcend all barriers of race and tradition. For that lesson, I thank you."

"Then all that talk of a family crisis..."

"Was only an excuse. It will serve for Starfleet - but I wanted you to know that my request was made willingly."

"Sheron, I don't know what to say. Just 'thank you', I guess. You see a great deal, don't you?"

"Captain - I wasn't born yesterday either." The Andorian smiled briefly for a moment. "My race understands friendship - you are both fortunate men."

"I am, I know." Kirk rose, held out his hand. "I hope, Sheron, that you will think of me as a friend. I owe you a great deal."

"I would be honoured, Captain." The Andorian clasped the extended hand for a moment. "Now... if you will sign the transfer..."

Kirk signed his name, and looked up. "If I can ever repay you..." he said haltingly.

"I understand, Captain; I am happy to have been of service."

Kirk smiled, then turned his head sharply towards the door, an expression of concern in his eyes.

"Is something wrong?" Sheron asked.

"No... it's only... Spock's awake... and he's troubled..."

"Go to him, Captain - your news will reassure him."

"Yes." It was a sigh of thankfulness; with a last smile of farewell, Kirk was gone.

Sheron stared at the closed door of the briefing room. Now that he had made his offer, he half expected a feeling of regret that he had acted hastily;

it did not come. Kirk's eyes, alight with joy and life, were reward enough. He might never experience at first hand the depth of friendship Kirk and Spock shared, but he was part of their world now, their happiness enfolded him too. Had he remained on the Enterprise, he would have won, at best, eventual acceptance from Kirk and his crew - now he would always be welcome among them. He had lost, by his own decision, the most rewarding assignment he could have hoped for, but with Kirk's influence behind him there would be other opportunities; he had found instead a true understanding of the value of a friend.

It was, all things considered, a fair exchange.

THE FAILURE by T.G.Z.C.

They failed him at the Academy, kicked him out
During the second year. He could not understand
Their reasons; his results were always good,
His marks the highest seen for many years.
In fitness he excelled, he swept the board
In the sports day at the end of his first year.
He was polite and courteous, gave his seniors
All the respect that was their due; and never
Bullied or belittled those unfortunates
Who lagged behind him in their daily tasks.
And yet they failed him for one vital flaw.
Aliens come in many shapes and sizes -
He was afraid of ants.

OBSESSION by T.G.Z.C.

The Farragut...years ago.
I smelt that honey-sweet scent then
And even thought it pleasant... Odd,
I've never been able to relish honey since;
I never realised that before.
We got away that time...those who still lived.
Nearly two hundred dead...among them my first Captain,
A man who taught me almost all I know
About my work. The planet Tychos 4...
We interdicted it, of course...not realising
That the creature could traverse the space
Between the stars. Creature...or creatures?
We must attempt
To destroy this one - and hope there are no more.

You risked your life again today.

I had no choice.

There was no need; any competent officer...

The responsibility is always mine.

You have responsibility to your ship, your crew -

I know that you can always fill my place.

You even told me not to follow you.

I would not risk your life as well -

Logically, I am the more expendable.

I could not bear to see you die.

You know I do not wish to see you die.

I know, we need each other. But -

But still you take the risks upon yourself.

I have no choice.

SAJAN by Valerie Piacentini

Located in a remote corner of the galaxy, the planet swung peacefully in orbit around its sun. Originally a colony founded by a long-forgotten religious sect from Earth, it had evolved over the years into a quiet, semi-rural society; there were few large cities, and only a little heavy industry - the inhabitants supported themselves mainly by agriculture, and the export of their one valuable commodity, the fine, soft wool of the native equivalent of sheep.

Although a member of the Federation, Sanctuary was of no strategic importance, and as it possessed no attractions in the way of rare minerals, it remained untroubled by the political conflicts of the Federation - there was nothing here to draw the acquisitive eyes of either Klingons or Romulans. The tiny spaceport was a trading centre only, though very occasionally Starfleet ships would call briefly to allow their crews the relaxation of shore leave in the capital city.

These visits however made little impact on the majority of the citizens, who carried on their peaceful, stolid lives aware of, but not particularly interested in, the wide-reaching galactic civilisations that flowed around them.

Sheriff Blair disliked mysteries; yet now, he thought gloomily, he was faced with one. He had prided himself that in the small town of Arden, crime was scarcely a problem - the occasional drunk, of course, sometimes an outbreak of petty theft, once even a case of arson - but this latest series of crimes was outrageous, horrifying. Several young women had been attacked in the town and the surrounding countryside; luckily, none fatally so far, but all had been injured in a manner which testified to the callous savagery of their assailant.

Blair investigated, sick at heart - surely none of the men he had known all his life could be responsible? Unfortunately, none of the women could describe the man who attacked them; there were no clues to his identity, apart from the unusual physical strength he displayed.

Unconsciously hoping for a solution which would divert the guilt from his neighbours, Blair found himself considering the most obvious suspect, the new tenant of the old Forbes place on the edge of town.

The arrangements had been made through a lawyer in the capital, and the newcomer had moved in late one night, so that no-one had seen his arrival, and no-one in town seemed to know anything about him. He was a young man, this Kirk, to have chosen a life of isolation; for the house stood in extensive grounds, thickly wooded and heavily overgrown. He was seldom seen except when he drove into town for supplies, and the speculation increased when it was found that he politely, but firmly, discouraged all attempts to engage him in personal conversation.

Investigation revealed that he made no telephone calls, and received none; no visitors were ever seen at the house, nor was any mail delivered - he seemed to be, by his own choice, cut off from any social contact. And it was, by Blair's reckoning, shortly after his arrival in town that the attacks had begun. Certainly, he must be investigated - but discreetly; Blair knew only too well how easily rumour would brand a man as guilty without proof.

Casually, the Sheriff wandered past the grocery store one morning, timing himself so that he collided heavily with the emerging Kirk; the man staggered, his purchases flying.

"Sorry about that," Blair apologised. "My fault - let me help you." Kirk glanced at him, but Blair was scrambling after some tins that had rolled along the pavement.

"That's the lot, I think," he said at last; then, casually, "Settled in all right, Mr. Kirk?"

"Yes, thank you; there are some repairs needed, of course - that keeps me busy." The pleasant voice was light, the lips smiled, but Blair saw that the

hazel eyes were wary, defensive. He gestured Kirk towards the car.

"I'll bring these."

What was the man hiding? Despite his wish to pin the attacks on an outsider, Blair's every instinct told him this man could be trusted. He moved with the air of a man accustomed to authority, his face resolute and controlled. The simple clothes he wore were expensive, as was his car - he was young, good-looking, attractive to women - as his own daughter had informed him emphatically - why should such a man choose to bury himself in an isolated house in a small town?

Reaching the car Blair paused as Kirk reached for his keys; across the street he noticed the youngest Morris boy playing with some friends. Suddenly a ball bounced into the street, and the child followed - straight into the path of a heavy truck which had just turned the corner.

Shock held Blair frozen for a few vital seconds, but Kirk was already moving; dropping his purchases he raced across the road, snatched the child up and threw him to a startled passer-by; but as he turned to jump clear he stumbled and the truck was upon him, sending him spinning in a crumpled heap to the side of the road.

Somehow the Sheriff found himself calming the confused crowd that quickly gathered; he was conscious only of the terrified child screaming somewhere in the background, and of a pale face, blood-streaked, at his feet. Snapping an order for an ambulance he knelt and gingerly touched the chest, feeling with relief that Kirk's heart was still beating. When the ambulance came he rode with it, reluctant to leave the stranger.

At the hospital there was an anxious wait until the doctor appeared at last.

"How is he?" Blair enquired.

"He was lucky - the truck must have caught him only a glancing blow. There's bad bruising, and a slight concussion, but we won't have to transfer him to the city hospital. He's still unconscious, though, and likely to remain so for some hours yet. I'm glad he's going to make it - I heard what he did."

"Yes, I couldn't have reached the kid in time. I'll look in tomorrow, doctor, just to see how he is."

The doctor glanced at some papers he was carrying. "Do you know anything about him? I need details of his next-of-kin and so on."

"Can't help you, I'm afraid - he's a stranger in town. I'll talk to him when he comes round, and see what I can find out."

That night the mysterious attacker struck again. His hysterical victim had a fortunate escape - some neighbours returning from an evening out heard screams, and scared him off; although shocked, the girl was unhurt, but like the others she could only repeat that her assailant was unusually strong, and moved very quietly - he had approached her from behind, and she had heard nothing. Blair was aware of a curious relief mixed with his frustration - Kirk was in hospital, still unconscious, so he could not be responsible, after all. He was glad - he had liked the man, and his action in saving the child had not been that of a man who could attack young women so brutally..

The following day Sheriff Blair returned to the hospital to visit Kirk; the doctor met him with a worried frown.

"He's not responding; seems to have something on his mind that's upsetting him. I can't understand what he's talking about - see if you can make sense of it."

Blair entered the isolation ward quietly. Kirk was lying in bed, his eyes closed; he was under restraint, a necessary precaution as he was tossing from

side to side, muttering quietly. Blair leaned closer, and placed a gentle hand on the burning forehead.

"Can I help?" he asked.

Kirk's eyes opened, unfocussed, bright with fever. The unintelligible muttering steadied into words.

"Spock...must reach...alone...so afraid...Spock...must help...Spock..." For an instant the eyes cleared. "Help Spock," he said distinctly; then his head fell back and he slipped once more into unconsciousness.

Blair straightened, a puzzled frown creasing his brow. Who was Spock? And how was he supposed to help him? It seemed that Kirk had been cleared of one mystery only to be involved in another. Or...was he? It might, after all, be the same one...

Grimly, Blair checked his holstered gun. Somehow he had the suspicion that a visit of inspection to the old Forbes place might be rewarding.

The house looked peaceful, deserted, as Blair surveyed it in the late afternoon sun. He was alone; Kirk was, after all, entitled to his privacy if he had nothing criminal to conceal - but he had told his deputy that he would be calling at the house to try and trace Kirk's next-of-kin.

To his surprise Blair saw that all the windows on the ground floor were heavily shuttered; either Kirk was afraid of intruders during what he had intended to be only a short absence, or he was taking precautions against being spied on.

The door was locked. Blair had suspected that, and pulled from his pocket the key-ring he had found among Kirk's possessions. The door swung open easily, and he stepped into the hall. The lights came on at a touch; well, that was a relief - he hadn't fancied groping about in the gloom.

Taking a firm grip on his gun Blair began a tour of the ground floor, finding that the rooms showed little sign of occupation. The exception was the kitchen, where a table had been laid for a meal; with a sinking heart he noted two place settings. So his fears had been confirmed; someone else was living here, someone whose presence Kirk felt it necessary to keep a secret. There could only be one reason for such concealment, and Blair knew a bitter disappointment - he had wanted to trust the man.

Leaving the kitchen Blair cautiously began to climb the stairs; from the landing he looked to left and right, wondering where to start his search. A patch of light wood on a door at the end of the landing decided him, and he hurried forward to find that the heavy door had been burst open from the inside. His mind raced, considering - someone had been locked in that room, someone with unusual strength... He must have broken out during the night, escaped...

Forgetting in his anger the shuttered windows and the locked doors, Blair turned away, intending to find the telephone and contact his deputy. He had only just begun the movement when steel-strong fingers clamped down on his shoulder, and he felt himself crumpling helplessly to the floor.

Blair stirred, groaned, and pulled himself unsteadily to his feet; he was not sure how long he had been unconscious, but certainly a considerable time had elapsed, for it was now dark outside. As he gingerly rubbed his aching neck and shoulder, he became aware of a cold draught blowing up the stairs - the front door, which he had carefully closed behind him, stood wide open. Blair caught his breath in horrified realisation - the maniac had made good his escape, might even now be on the search for another victim; and this time, he might be successful.

Running downstairs Blair found the telephone, and called his office; Dave

Phillips, his deputy, answered.

"Dave, I'm at the Forbes place. Kirk's been hiding that madman we're after; he attacked me, and escaped. Round up search parties - make sure they're armed - and get them to start looking before we have a death on our hands. Warn them to be careful - this one's dangerous."

"What about Kirk?"

"I don't suppose he'll be going anywhere, but put a guard on him in case our man finds out where he is and tries to contact him. Get started right away - you've got a lot of ground to cover. I'll join you as soon as I've finished looking around here."

Replacing the receiver, Blair returned to the landing, intending to investigate the once-locked room.

He found that it was furnished as a bedroom, containing two beds, one showing signs of recent occupation, the other neatly made up. The wardrobe held clothing, some in Kirk's size, the rest intended for someone taller and slimmer. After a cursory glance Blair was about to close the door again when the gleam of gold caught his eye; he reached to the back of the wardrobe and lifted down a hanger, his eyes widening as he realised what he held.

Blair had never actually seen one before, but newsreels ensured that everyone on Sanctuary could recognise the uniform of a Starfleet Captain. Beside it hung another, a blue shirt this time; he was not able to identify the rank of its owner, but it bore the same gold arrowhead badge.

Blake hung the uniforms on the outside of the wardrobe, and stared at them thoughtfully; he was, he realised, involved in something he couldn't handle - but where could he turn to for advice?

Investigating further, he found on a shelf a box containing equipment, but the only items he could identify were two communicators. Gingerly, he lifted one, and examined it carefully; from films he had seen he thought he remembered roughly how it worked, and after several fumbling attempts he managed to raise the grid.

"Hello?" he said nervously. "Is anyone there?"

The answer was immediate and explosive. "Who the hell are you?" a voice demanded. "Whit's goin' on doon there? Where's the Captain?"

"I'm Sheriff Blair of Arden," he replied. "Are you with Starfleet?"

"Lt-Commander Montgomery Scott, in temporary command of the U.S.S. Enterprise," the voice identified itself precisely, then continued agitatedly, "Sheriff, did ye say? Has something happened to Captain Kirk?"

"It's a bit difficult to explain. There's been...an accident, the...the Captain's in hospital, and..."

"Stay right where ye are," the voice ordered. "I'll send somebody down."

Blair waited, relieved that the responsibility was no longer his alone. Very soon he heard a low humming sound, and saw four glittering columns of light which coalesced into the figures of four men dressed in Starfleet uniform. One stepped forward.

"I'm Dr. McCoy," he greeted the Sheriff. "This - " he indicated one of the red-shirted men who accompanied him " - is Security Chief Baillie. Now, what's happened?"

Blair explained how he had come to investigate the house, hastily reassuring the doctor that Kirk was not seriously hurt; then he spoke of the assaults that had taken place, his initial suspicion of Kirk, and his final certainty when he himself had been struck down by the man the Captain had so carefully concealed. An exclamation of impatience from the doctor interrupted him.

"If you think that Spock's responsible for these attacks, you're a fool!" McCoy said disgustedly. "Of course, you don't know him... Scotty, did you get all that?"

"Aye, Ah did," came the voice from the still open communicator in Blair's hand. "I've got Chekov scanning for Vulcan readings now, but there's a lot of movement in the area, and it's confusing the sensors."

"The search parties," Blair explained. "I ordered them out when I was sure ...I couldn't take a chance on what he'd do..." His voice trailed off.

"Armed, I suppose?" McCoy snorted. "Chief?"

"Leave it to me, Doctor." The Security Chief turned to his two assistants. "Blade, Sorenson, get out there and keep an eye on things. Mr. Scott will give you Mr. Spock's co-ordinates when he's found; get between him and the search parties, but don't go near him - remember, he'll be scared and confused. He's hiding somewhere, and it's up to you to make sure that none of these trigger-happy vigilantes get near him. And gentlemen - " Baillie's beckoning finger summoned the two men closer, " - if anyone other than the Captain or Dr. McCoy lays a finger on Mr. Spock, I'll have a few words to say to you both. I trust I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, Chief," the two assured him fervently.

"Off with you, then; call more men from the ship if you need them. They're good boys," he said earnestly to Blair as the Security men left, "but it doesn't do any harm to keep them on their toes."

"No, I suppose not," the Sheriff agreed dazedly.

"Now for the Captain," McCoy broke in decisively. "Scotty, can you beam us over to the hospital?"

"If you'll excuse me, Doctor, I'll go and keep an eye on the search," Baillie said. "I'll keep in touch with Mr. Scott - one of us will let you know when we have Mr. Spock safe."

"Thanks, Baillie. When you're ready, Scotty."

He did not, Sheriff Blair decided, like the transporter system; but for once his companion did not voice his own disapproval as they sparkled into existence before the goggling eyes of a youthful deputy; with merely a grunt McCoy hustled the dazed Sheriff into the room where Kirk lay.

The duty doctor hovered apprehensively as the Starfleet surgeon made a thorough examination, then relaxed visibly when the blue eyes flashed a glance of approval.

"You've done a good job," McCoy commented, "but he should have come round by now. This'll do it." He pressed a hypo to Kirk's shoulder, and within seconds the Captain stirred and awoke. He stared blankly at first, then his eyes widened in recognition.

"Bones!" he exclaimed, struggling to sit up. "Where's Spock?"

"Take it easy, Jim," the doctor ordered, pressing him down. With a curt command McCoy dismissed the deputy and the duty doctor, and Kirk subsided impatiently until the door closed behind them.

"Well?" he snapped impatiently.

"Jim, there's been some trouble," McCoy said slowly. "Did you hear about a series of attacks on women in this area recently?"

"Yes, vaguely; but it's got nothing to do with..."

"I'm afraid it has. It seems that you mentioned Spock when you were raving, and the Sheriff here went out to the house to investigate."

"Oh no!"

"Oh yes. Your pet Vulcan panicked, nerve pinched him, and ran - he's out in the woods somewhere, with armed search parties after him."

"I must find him!" Kirk sat up abruptly.

"Not yet. Scotty's scanning for him, and Baillie and some of his boys are keeping an eye on the search parties. As soon as he's found I'll take you to him, I promise. There's no point in rushing around just now - relax, and get some rest until we have news. You know the Chief won't let anyone near Spock."

"You're right, of course," Kirk said wretchedly, "but he'll be so afraid."

Blair could contain his curiosity no longer. "What is all this about?" he burst out. "Who's Spock? Why all the secrecy? And why did he attack me?"

McCoy glanced at Kirk, and received a weary nod of assent. "Sit down, Sheriff," the doctor said. "It's a long story."

* * * * *

At the transporter station on Starbase 12 Jim Kirk turned anxiously to McCoy.

"Where the hell is he?" he demanded for the dozenth time. "The Vulcan liner should have arrived an hour ago, and I made special arrangements for him to beam straight down."

Kirk and McCoy had spent their leave at the base, while Spock had taken the opportunity to pay a visit home. Their leave was now over, and the three had arranged to meet and return to the Enterprise together; but the arrival of the liner from Vulcan had not been announced.

"I'm going to ask..." Kirk was interrupted as an official of the spaceline approached him discreetly.

"There is a message for you in the President's office, Captain," he murmured.

Kirk opened his mouth to ask a question, thought better of it, and beckoning McCoy, followed the messenger.

The President of the spaceline was not alone; a very worried-looking Admiral Bradshaw was with him.

"Sit down, Kirk, Doctor," the Admiral began without greeting. "We have an emergency on our hands - it's a lucky thing that the Enterprise is here just now. We have not released the news as yet, but the liner Saturn Queen, en route from Vulcan, has been attacked and seriously damaged; we have her position, but communications are poor - all we know is that most of the crew and passengers are dead or injured."

"My God!" Kirk burst out. "My First Officer was returning from leave on that ship!"

"I see; well rescue ships are already on their way, but I want you to investigate - we think we know who is responsible."

"Klingons?" guessed McCoy. "Surely not, in this area."

"No, not Klingons - pirates. We've had trouble with them recently, but nothing on this scale. We knew very little about them, but a short time ago one of their crew was injured on a raid; they must have thought he was dead, because they left him behind. The little information we have, he gave us.

The pirate leader is named Raynar. He was the ruler of a planet which recently appealed to the Federation for assistance in overthrowing his tyranny; normally we wouldn't have interfered, but we had evidence he was sympathetic to the Romulans, so... Anyway, Rayner bitterly resented the Federation, and Starfleet; we think this is his revenge on us. He escaped when Starfleet moved in, taking a fortune with him, so he's not doing this for money. Our informant told

us he equipped a ship, set up a base somewhere, and recruited a crew of criminals and renegades. His First Officer's a Klingon, and we understand he has at least one Vulcan among his crew; the others are mainly Humans, but other races are represented as well. He's dangerous, Kirk; his ship - the Starwolf - is fast and well equipped. We'll get him in time, but he can do a lot of damage before he's caught - he's not too particular about sparing innocent lives."

"What about his base?" Kirk asked.

"Nothing, I'm afraid. Our informant couldn't help us there; it seems that only Rayner himself, his First Officer and his helmsman, know its whereabouts. We want him, Kirk; you have a free hand to act as you think necessary."

"I'll get him, sir," Kirk said grinly. "Come on, Bones."

The rescue ships were already bustling about the stricken liner when the Enterprise reached her. Kirk beamed over, taking a full medical team; Scotty followed with Sulu and a Security squad to give what help they could

McCoy and his staff were quickly involved in aiding the surviving passengers and crew, while Scotty immediately began work on repairs to allow the liner to be taken to safety. Before heading for the bridge Kirk despatched the Security team to search for any survivors trapped in the ship, and followed McCoy into the overcrowded sickbay.

His heart in his mouth, he moved among the improvised beds without finding the man he sought; he was just nerving himself to enter the room where the bodies of the dead were laid out when McCoy emerged and barred his way.

"He's not there, Jim," he said, and watched as Kirk's tense expression relaxed a little. "Don't worry - Security will find him."

But they did not. As some sort of order was gradually produced from the chaos, the reports began to come in, each with the same result - there was no sign of Spock. His cabin was empty, he was not among the dead or injured, and a thorough search of the ship had revealed no sign of him. The Vulcan had vanished.

"Do you think the pirates took him, Bones?" Kirk asked, worriedly.

"It's possible. If they knew he was a Starfleet officer, they might have thought it worthwhile holding him for ransom; or if they knew of his family connections..."

"Then all we can do is wait until they make contact," Kirk said quietly. "I'll be on the bridge if you need me, Bones."

Hoping that the liner's dead Captain had been able to leave some clue to the attackers, Kirk ordered the ship's log played. After some minutes of routine reports came the first hint of trouble - the radio contact from the pirates ordering the ship to hold position. Then followed a confused babble of orders as the Saturn Queen attempted to outrun the pirates, but was steadily overhauled. When the attack began in earnest the ship's screens went down almost at once - they had never been designed to take such punishment.

Kirk bit his lips in frustration - he was learning nothing useful - then suddenly he shot bolt upright in the command chair as a serene, familiar voice broke into the din.

"This is Commander Spock of the U.S.S. Enterprise. All ascertainable details of the attacking vessel have been fed into the ship's computers. Traces indicate that the pirate ship approached from the 'Devil's Reef' area of space; it is reasonable to assume that her base will be located in that sector, and that she will return there to evade pursuit. I regret..."

The voice was drowned in a flood of static; Kirk allowed the tape to run on, but it remained obstinately silent - presumably the recording mechanism had been damaged.

"What's the Devil's Reef, Jim?" asked McCoy, who had arrived unnoticed on

the bridge."

"Oh, it's a solar system of sorts, named after an old seafaring hazard on Earth, I believe. There are no planets, just hundreds and thousands of asteroids, ranging in size from a few inches to several miles across. It's a dangerous area to enter, but a skilled pilot could hide a ship there indefinitely. It's not much to go on, Bones, but it's all we're likely to get. And Spock thought it worth mentioning. Have you finished here?"

"Yes, I'll leave M'Benga to keep an eye on the injured. Scotty has finished the repairs, he says, so the liner can be taken back to base."

"Right. Let's get back to the Enterprise. We're going hunting."

In the sickbay of the pirate vessel Starwolf, Captain Raynar leaned over the bed and delivered a resounding blow to the face of the man who lay unconscious. There was no response.

"Damn Vulcans!" he muttered.

"Try again, Raynar," advised a harsh voice at his side. The Captain turned, acknowledging the arrival of his second-in-command, the Klingon renegade Kuthra.

"Might as well," he grunted. "He's no use to us like this." He lashed out again, with increased force, and in response the Vulcan's eyes flickered open.

"Awake, are you?" Raynar said. "How do you feel, Sajan?"

A frown of bewilderment crossed the face of the man on the bed. "Sajan?" he said questioning. "I regret, I do not..."

"Looks like the doctor was right, Raynar," Kuthra broke in. "That knock on the head has made him lose his memory. What can you remember, Sajan?"

"Nothing at all," the man addressed as Sajan commented calmly. "Most inconvenient. May I request that someone inform me precisely who I am, and what has happened?"

"Well..." Raynar began, but was interrupted by the Klingon.

"The other matter, Captain... Our presence is urgently required."

"I'll come at once. Sajan, I'll send Dr. Fellows in to see you - he can fill you in. Don't worry - I'm sure you'll remember everything soon. See you later."

Left alone, the Vulcan lay back frowning in concentration; try as he would, he could recall nothing of his life before he had awakened in this room. The two men, Raynar and Kuthra, might have been total strangers - even the name Sajan awoke no memories for him. He was striving vainly to recover even a flicker of his past when the door opened again and a short, elderly Human bustled in, rubbing his hands.

"Right, Sajan," he said briskly, "this is no more than I expected, you know. You took a nasty crack on the head during our last raid - must have scrambled your memory circuits."

"I am not a computer," the Vulcan answered instinctively, and was puzzled by his instinctive response. "Raid?" he asked.

There was something about this man that he disliked and distrusted, he thought, without being able to give any reason; despite his friendly manner his smile did not reach his eyes, and there was a cold undertone in his voice. However, it seemed that Fellows was to fill him in on his past, so he listened attentively to the events that were described to him.

They were, Fellows informed him without the slightest trace of embarrassment, on board the pirate ship Starwolf, on which Sajan had served for a year under the command of the dispossessed Lord Raynar, who had turned to piracy out

of a desire for revenge on the Federation and Starfleet for the loss of his heritage. His mixed Human and alien crew were criminals, outcasts of all races, and fiercely loyal to their commander.

The Starwolf's last attack had been on the liner Saturn Queen; there had been unexpected resistance from her crew, and Sajan had been struck down in the fighting. The Starwolf was now on her way back to her base in the Devil's Reef, where the liner's cargo would be disposed of through Raynar's many contacts.

"And that's all I can tell you," Fellowes concluded. "Your personal life I know nothing about - no-one talks about his past here."

"What do you suggest I do?" asked Sajan.

"Well, in a case like yours, memory often returns spontaneously once the bruising of the brain has healed. Don't try to force it - just take your time, ease your way back into the ship's routine. There's no need for you to stay here - go back to your quarters and take things easy for a few days. I'll order light duties only, and we'll see what happens. I could use drugs, but I'd rather not risk it with a Vulcan - your reactions are too unpredictable."

Sajan followed the doctor's advice, but his confusion only deepened. He found his way to the quarters he had been told were his - they were furnished in the Vulcan fashion which he recognised but he could not feel any familiarity or possessiveness about anything in the rooms. He examined a chess set, finding that he instinctively knew the moves, but he could not remember learning them; there was a harp standing by the desk - his fingers moved automatically, produced the correct notes, but when or where he had learned the tune, he could not remember.

It was the same when he went to the bridge; he followed orders automatically, seemed to know exactly how to operate the equipment, knew his way around the console without having to think about it - but he could not capture the elusive memory his surroundings evoked.

Even the crew remained strangers. They knew him, called him by name, but he could not respond. They had been told what had happened to him, however, and with a kind of rough friendliness attempted to awaken his memory by talking to him of events and situations they had shared - all in vain.

Accepting at last the doctor's advice, to give himself time and not try to hurry things, Sajan returned to his quarters at the end of his duty period. As he left the elevator he met Raynar and Kuthra, who were standing talking to another Vulcan, who nodded a courteous greeting as Sajan approached.

Raynar turned and beckoned. "Fellowes told me what he suggested, and I agree," he said. "We'll have some free time soon - Setron here thinks it advisable that we lie low for a time after the Saturn Queen affair. It's our first really big job, and we'd better let the fuss die down. Once we make base, take all the time you need to work things out."

Sajan inclined his head. "Thank you, Captain. With your permission, I will go to my quarters and rest."

"Do that. I don't want you ill, you're too valuable. Oh, by the way, we should reach Tortuga tomorrow." In response to Sajan's enquiring glance Raynar chuckled. "Our base - I named it after an old pirate stronghold back on Earth."

"I see. Most appropriate. Goodnight, gentlemen."

In the privacy of his quarters Sajan stretched out on the bed, and began to consider what he had learned - and what he had not. His biggest problem - what was he doing here at all? To find himself apparently accepted as a member of a pack of outlaws and renegades had been a considerable shock.

Raynar he instinctively mistrusted, despite his seeming friendliness - he could sense the man's cold ruthlessness. The Klingon - Kuthra - was no better; there was an air of barely-leashed cruelty about the man that Sajan found

repulsive. Yet he knew he must hide his reactions; these men considered him one of themselves, but if they suspected his reservations, action against him would be swift and vicious. He must wait, learn what he could, until he was more sure of his ground.

Then there was the Vulcan, Setron; for the first time Sajan had felt a glimmer of recognition when he met the impassive dark eyes, so like his own... but was it in truth a memory, or merely an instinctive response to one of his own race? He rather thought it was a memory, but there was a subtle...wrongness...about it that confused him.

With a sigh Sajan postponed his efforts to plan his next move; his head ached abominably, he felt so tired... Perhaps when he was rested, he would see his way more clearly.

As the Starwolf approached the Devil's Reef Sajan grew puzzled. The area was certainly confusing, with its complexity of planetary bodies, but surely the powerful sensors of a starship would be able to detect them?

Raynar took over the helm as they entered the edge of the Reef, and Sajan watched in curiosity as they approached one of the larger planetoids; then, to his utter amazement, a shaft opened in the surface below them, large enough to admit the ship.

"Welcome to Tortuga," Raynar chuckled, noting his astonishment.

"No wonder we've remained undetected for so long," Sajan said. "A hollowed-out asteroid - Starfleet would have to take very precise readings to detect it."

"Even then, they'd have to know where we were, to compensate for my screens. There's no way they could detect us by chance."

"Expensive," the Klingon commented, "but worth it - we can sit in here and watch Starfleet going crazy trying to find us."

Raynar piloted the ship safely into its docking bay; whatever else he might be, the man was a superb pilot.

Because of Sajan's impaired memory Dr. Fellowes took him on a tour of the vast complex. The interior of the asteroid had been hollowed out to provide adequate living accommodation for the crew, and the Vulcan could only marvel at the ingenuity and patience that had gone into setting up this operation - in a rarely expansive mood, Raynar told him that almost his entire fortune had gone into equipping his ship and his base as a preparation for his career of piracy.

As the days passed Sajan familiarised himself with his surroundings; his memory did not return, but he gradually found himself fitting in to the routine of the base, and he was accepted unquestioningly by his fellow renegades. Yet the sense of alienation persisted, growing stronger; he could not imagine what had brought him here, among people he detested, and to a way of life that offended every instinct he possessed. The only person in whom he felt any interest was Setron, and he seemed very withdrawn, associating only with Raynar and Kuthra; he answered when spoken to, but never initiated a conversation, to an extent remarkable even in one of his reserved race.

For a few days the men of the Starwolf relaxed, then came the pursuit they had expected - sensors detected the presence of a Federation Starship in the Reef. Too large to manoeuvre easily, she held position and explored the asteroid belt thoroughly by sensor scan.

Raynar was confident of his safety until he received a report that a shuttlecraft, obviously from the Starship, had crashed near the concealed entrance to the base.

"It could be a coincidence," Raynar told his assembled officers, "but I

don't like it. They didn't have time to send a distress call, so we have some time yet before the ship comes looking for them. Sajan, you and Setron beam over and see what you can find out. The hull isn't breached, so the crew may have survived. If they're conscious, tell them you're Vulcan scientists investigating the Reef; try to find out what they know, and if they seem suspicious - kill them."

The two Vulcans beamed over to the wrecked shuttlecraft, accompanied by Martinez, another of Raynar's lieutenants, a clever, unscrupulous man whom Sajan disliked intensely.

There were three men in the wreck. Setron moved to check the condition of the pilot, while Sajan and Martinez examined the two passengers.

"The pilot is dead - killed in the crash," Setron said quietly.

"Well, these two are alive - a Starfleet Captain, and a doctor," Martinez replied. "What should we do with them? They're out cold."

"Let me see." Setron moved forward and leaned over the unconscious bodies; unseen by Martinez a flicker of...something...crossed the impassive face, but to the watching Sajan, his fellow Vulcan was displaying extreme shock and surprise. He looked at Sajan.

"Do you know them?"

"It is unlikely; my memory is impaired, as you know." Nevertheless, Sajan leaned forward and studied the two faces intently. The doctor was totally unfamiliar, but as he gazed at the face of the Captain, he felt a distinct sense of familiarity - somehow he knew that face, knew exactly how his voice would sound...

"Best kill them, then, just to be on the safe side?" Martinez asked, reaching for his phaser.

"No, wait!" Sajan thought frantically, seeking a logical reason to spare the two men. "To kill them would be unwise. Their companions would know that they were not killed in the crash, and would suspect that we must be in the area. They would search until they found us. It would be wiser to do nothing - their ship will find them, and they will leave when their scan of the base reveals nothing."

"I agree," Setron added in unexpected support. "Martinez, check their radio log - that should tell us if they suspect our presence in the area."

"Right." Martinez moved away and Sajan followed him, looking back in time to see a curious thing - Setron, who was returning the two officers to their former position sprawled on the floor, was leaning over the unconscious Captain; for an instant his hand touched the Human's face lightly, his fingers assuming almost the position for the mind-touch.

Puzzled, Sajan turned away, to catch Martinez' eye as the Human bent over the radio; he could not tell if the man had seen that fleeting gesture, but when he said nothing, he assumed that mere chance had caused the impression. When he looked back, Setron was standing patiently waiting for them.

The radio log revealed nothing of interest, revealing only that the shuttlecraft had been on a routine sweep of this section of the asteroid belt, so removing all trace of their visit, the three men beamed back to the base.

Raynar heard their report in silence, then said grudgingly, "I don't like the idea of leaving them alive, but you were right - if you'd killed them, their ship would have known we must be near, and they'd have made it a personal fight. We'll monitor them, and watch what they do."

Not long afterwards, the Starship's sensors began to scan the base; it was too well-concealed to be detected, but the shuttlecraft was found, it seemed, for a transporter beam was activated as the missing men were recovered. Then the starship passed out of range of their scanners, and Raynar relaxed.

The following day Sajan was again on duty in the base control room. Raynar was present, with Kuthra and Setron in attendance; the Captain had decided to maintain an alert until they could be sure the Federation ship had left the area.

Suddenly Martinez, who was in charge of communications, swung round in his chair.

"Captain - that Starship - she's making contact"

"On screen, Martinez," Raynar ordered.

The screen dissolved into a picture of the Starship's bridge; in the command chair sat the Captain Sajan had seen in the wrecked shuttlecraft. He shivered involuntarily as the hauntingly familiar voice, sounding just as he had imagined, came through the speaker.

"Captain Raynar, this is Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise. We have your base pinpointed - I suggest you surrender to avoid useless bloodshed. You have thirty minutes..."

"Cut it!" Raynar spat savagely; as the image faded he leaped to his feet. "How the hell did they find us?" he snarled.

"It must have been the Vulcan - Setron," Martinez burst out. "When we were in the shuttlecraft I saw him with that Captain. They're telepaths, aren't they? He was touching the Captain - he must have reached his mind and betrayed us!"

"So!" Raynar wheeled round to face Setron, who looked back at him expressionlessly. "You have recovered your memory, Commander."

"Indeed. A most ingenious idea, Captain. When you found me on the Saturn Queen you conceived the idea of using me - a Starfleet officer would be a valuable addition to your crew. Kuthra's adaptation of the mindsifter was...most effective; the false memory you created for me was very convincing. However, when I saw my Captain in the shuttlecraft, the surprise restored my memory. I am accustomed to linking with him - a brief contact was enough to enable me to reach his unconscious mind and give him the necessary information. It would be advisable for you to surrender - there is no escape."

"But we still have thirty minutes, Commander," Raynar said viciously, "and I am a vengeful man. You and your Captain have robbed me of my freedom; by the time he finds you, you will wish that I had killed you - and so will he. Bring him, Kuthra!"

The Klingon stepped forward and pulled the Vulcan to his feet, twisted his arm viciously and forced him out the door. Raynar followed, commanding his men to remain on the alert, and to prepare to resist the Federation attack when it came.

Sajan remained with Martinez in the control room, listening with dismay as the man described the hideous trick that had been played on the Vulcan, and how the entire crew of the Starwolf had conspired to confirm his identity as the renegade Setron.

"He'll be sorry now that he's got his memory back," the Human gloated. "Raynar is very...inventive, and Kuthra... Well, he really enjoys hurting people. That Federation Captain won't find much left of his precious First Officer when he gets here."

Dazed, sick with horror at what he had learned - to a Vulcan, tampering with anyone's mind was the worst of crimes - Sajan rose and moved closer to Martinez. Before the man could realise his intention his hand shot out, and the Human collapsed unconscious. Pushing him out of the way Sajan scanned the communications panel; luckily the settings had not been changed, and he quickly made contact with the Enterprise.

The face of the Human Captain - so disturbingly familiar - filled the screen; he was white and strained, his eyes worried.

"Do you surrender?" he asked crisply.

"Captain, I have little time -- I am making this call without Raynar's knowledge. If you wish to recover your First Officer alive and sane, I suggest you beam over a full Security team at once. Raynar and Kuthra have him -- they know he guided you here."

"How do I know it's not a trap?" Kirk asked suspiciously.

"You have only my word; but if you doubt me, send only one man to check out the situation."

The Captain studied him intently for a moment, then appeared to make up his mind. "Very well; I have your co-ordinates -- we'll be with you shortly."

Sooner than Sajan expected the hum of a transporter beam filled the room; Kirk himself materialised, accompanied by the doctor who had been with him in the shuttlecraft, and four Security men. The guards checked the room, and found no trap; one of them contacted the ship, and soon more guards were appearing in relays.

Kirk turned impatiently to Sajan. "Where's Spock?"

"Raynar took him -- probably to his quarters. I'll guide you."

Sajan led the way along the corridors. The Enterprise men proved to be swift and efficient -- the pirates they encountered along the way were taken by surprise and disarmed before they could raise the alarm.

At last Sajan signalled a halt, hearing voices round the corner. "That's Fellowes, the doctor," he whispered to Kirk. "He may know where Spock is -- let me ask him."

At Kirk's nod of assent Sajan advanced casually towards the doctor, who was talking to one of his assistants. They looked up at his approach.

"Looking for Raynar?" Fellowes asked.

"Yes, I have a message for him."

Fellowes grinned evilly. "I wouldn't interrupt him now, unless you have a strong stomach. He and Kuthra have that Starfleet officer -- you know, Setron -- in sickbay. He's real sore about being tricked -- be careful you don't spoil his fun."

"I'm afraid I shall have to," Sajan said quietly, drawing his phaser; raising his voice, he called, "Captain Kirk -- sickbay!"

"Why, you....!" Fellowes snarled, seeing the red-shirted Security men who approached at Sajan's call; he seemed about to attack the Vulcan, but the phaser lifted warningly, and he raised his hands in defeat.

Sajan paused long enough to see the two men taken into custody, then followed Kirk, who, with the doctor and half a dozen security guards, had burst into sickbay:

So swift and silent had been their approach that the two pirates had been taken by surprise; they had evidently fought back, though, for both were bleeding heavily as they struggled in the grip of the burly Security guards.

"Get them out of here," Sajan advised, then turned his attention to Kirk. "Captain, wait!" he shouted in warning, but it was too late -- Kirk reached the operating table, and stared down at its pitiful burden.

Joining him, Sajan felt his stomach heave in revulsion; after all, Raynar and Kuthra had had enough time -- too much time.

Incredibly, the Vulcan still lived, for the slow pulse of blood from the wounds that covered him showed that his heart was still beating; but worst of all, from the ruins of what had been a sensitive, handsome face, two dark eyes gazed up at them, filled with a soul-chilling agony and awareness that was the more dreadful for the silence in which the victim endured.

"Bones!" was all that Kirk could manage, but the doctor seemed to under-

stand; a hypo hissed, and the tragic eyes closed slowly. Kirk sagged against the table for a moment, then pushed himself upright, staring blankly at the green blood on his hands. "How is he?" he demanded hoarsely.

The doctor looked up, his face white. "It's...bad, Jim," he said slowly. "He'll live, I think, but he'll need extensive surgery; and his mind... God knows. Look." He carefully removed a metal band that encircled the Vulcan's head. "They've used the mindsifter on him again. I just don't know... But you'll have to be prepared, Jim...he could be insane."

"Insane! Oh, my God!" Kirk leaned over the table, took one of the broken hands in his, and held it gently to his cheek. With astonished pity, Sajan, that unemotional Vulcan, felt his throat tighten as he watched a Human Captain weeping in anguish for an alien half-breed he called 'friend'.

* * * * *

"We kept him alive," McCoy's quiet voice continued wearily, "but to this day I don't know how - I suspect Jim had a lot to do with it; he never left Spock's side except when he was in surgery.

Surgery... Yes, there was so much of that, but even so, his face... I'll be able to restore it in time, but there's so much still to do. His hands... they healed, thank God - he was an accomplished musician. Mercifully, they didn't touch his eyes - perhaps they didn't have time; but it was weeks before he could walk again. Then there was the damage they'd done with the mindsifter..." He turned appealingly to Blair. "You'd have had to have known him as he was before...a Vulcan, confident, serene, always totally self-controlled; now he's like a frightened child...the only one he really trusts is Jim - and me, perhaps. We can cure that, too, in time - his own people have methods...but he was too weak, and we had to wait... I ordered medical leave, until he was strong enough for the final operations, but it was difficult... I wanted to get him away from hospitals for a while, but his face...people turned from him in revulsion. I'd heard of this town from a friend of mine who used to live here; he told me about the old Forbes place, and it seemed ideal - a quiet, isolated house where he could remain concealed, with Jim to keep him company...things were going so well..."

"Until now," Kirk broke in despairingly. "Now he's out there somewhere, alone, frightened, perhaps even hurt...hunted like an animal, to be shot down on sight... Bones, we must do something!"

"We will," McCoy said soothingly. "Don't worry, Jim - Baillie won't let anyone near him."

Sheriff Blair had listened attentively to the story McCoy told; he was a compassionate man when his duties allowed, and his heart went out to the crippled alien the doctor had depicted so vividly; but honesty made him say quietly, "From what you've said your Mr. Spock is mentally disturbed; he could be the one we're after, you know."

"No!" Kirk stated violently. "I was with him all the time; and you don't understand - he's the gentlest, kindest person I've ever known...he couldn't harm anyone. I hurt him...so badly...changing the dressings...but he never complained... He can't be responsible!"

"Perhaps not," Blair said soothingly; but he remained unconvinced. He had only Kirk's word, and was certain that the Captain would lie without a second thought to save his friend. After a moment, wanting to distract Kirk, Blair asked, "What happened to the pirates?"

"The pirates? Oh, they were returned to Abron - that's where the Saturn Queen was registered - and sent for trial. The Abronese still invoke the death penalty for murder. Raynar, Kuthra - oh yes, and Fellowes - were found guilty of murder, and hanged; the others - most were sent for rehabilitation."

"And Sajan? He helped you," Blair remembered.

"That was a curious case. We simply couldn't identify him - there were no records anywhere to indicate his true identity. The only clue we had was that he thought he recognised me, but that didn't help - I couldn't remember ever meeting him. The Vulcans tried a meld, but his barriers were too strong - they had to give up, or they'd have killed him. Whatever he was trying to hide he succeeded - his past life is still a mystery. But whoever he was, the Vulcans and Starfleet psychologists were all agreed - he was no danger to society. He was given a suspended sentence, and released... I heard he went back to Vulcan. I was glad of that - he did save Spock..." Kirk's voice faded in exhaustion, and McCoy stepped closer.

"Try to rest now, Jim; we'll need you when we find him."

Kirk nodded and lay back in the chair, but he did not sleep; his haunted eyes remained fixed on the dark window as he waited - as they all waited.

At last the bleep of a communicator broke the silence.

"McCoy here."

"Baillie. We've found him, Doctor - he's in a sort of cave in the woods about five miles from you. I haven't approached him - thought I'd wait for you and the Captain - but I've got my men posted around; that mob is somewhere near, but they won't get near him, you can count on that."

"Thanks, Chief; we're on our way. McCoy out." The doctor closed his communicator, and glanced at Blair. "What's the quickest way?" he asked.

"I'll drive you - you can see the cave from the track."

Shortly afterwards Blair, McCoy and Kirk stood by the Sheriff's car in the middle of a forest track. In the distance could be heard the sound of the search parties, but the three men had found their quarry as they peered intently at the dark mouth of a cave a few hundred yards away.

Baillie appeared from the shadows. "He's just inside the cave, sir."

"Right - I'll go alone." Kirk turned at Blair's movement of protest. "I know you still think he's dangerous, but he won't hurt me. Have you a light, Baillie?"

"Here, sir." The Security Chief handed over an emergency light, and with a reassuring smile at his companions, Kirk moved forward.

"If you'll excuse me," Baillie murmured, "my boys and I have a little something to take care of..." Noiselessly he melted into the shadows.

The light had reached the entrance to the cave and was stationary, throwing a soft pool of illumination against the darkness. Within its circle Blair could see a slim, huddled shape crouching against the rocks, a shape that curled tighter upon itself as Kirk walked slowly forward, and knelt.

"Spock." The one word came clearly as Kirk reached out to grasp the trembling shoulders; there was a moment's resistance, then the fugitive turned, burrowing his face into the Captain's shoulder, clinging to him fiercely. With careful tenderness Kirk's arms closed around the man he held, pulling him close, and his voice sank to an inaudible, comforting murmur.

Somehow, Blair was glad he could not hear that whispered exchange; but when Kirk raised a hand to beckon them forward he followed eagerly at McCoy's heels.

At their approach the dark head lifted from Kirk's shoulder and turned to face them - with an intense effort Blair forced himself to concentrate only on the eyes, beautiful, velvet-dark, shining like stars in the ruined face. For a moment pity choked him - if the physical damage was a symbol of the harm that had been done to his mind, how this man must have suffered! And McCoy had repaired much already, he remembered.

He moved, and the dark eyes focussed on him, widening in alarm at the unfamiliar face. Kirk stroked the Vulcan's hair gently. "It's all right, Spock; he won't harm you, you're safe with me."

"Safe...yes...with you," Spock said slowly.

"Captain, I'm sorry," Blair said quietly, "but he is a suspect; he should be questioned..." He broke off as a red-shirted figure darted to Kirk's side.

"The search parties are coming, Captain," the Security guard reported.

"So I see."

Led by Dave Phillips, a group of armed men emerged from the trees to surround the cave entrance.

"You got him, then, Sheriff," someone called. "Come on, you - and him over!" Rifles were levelled, and Blair started forward in alarm.

"Hold your fire!" he called. "There are guards all round you." He had seen the Security men who shadowed the search party, and knew that any violence would be countered swiftly.

"What do you want us to do, Sheriff?" Phillips called.

"Captain, please hand him over," Blair pleaded. "You can see that there will be trouble if you try to take him away - we have our suspect..."

"But you haven't got the criminal - I have," announced a voice from the darkness as Baillie strolled casually into the circle of light. His two aides, Blade and Sorenson, followed, supporting between them the semi-conscious figure of a man Blair did not recognise. The two Security men looked a little dishevelled, but when they dropped their prisoner to the ground at Blair's feet, it was clear that he had sustained considerable damage.

Baillie shook his head sadly. "He tried to take my boys," he said reprovingly, "so I'm afraid he's...er...slightly damaged. He's the one you're after, Sheriff. I did a bit of checking - he escaped from a prison for the criminally insane about thirty miles away. They didn't send out a warning, thought it might cause a panic. I'll have to have a few words with the Governor... Still," he smiled brightly at the Sheriff, "you won't want our Mr. Spock now, will you?"

Without waiting for a reply Baillie swung round, issuing terse orders. The prisoner was handcuffed, and pushed to Blair's side; the Security guards assembled in front of the cave, their eyes still watchful, phasers at the ready. With an abrupt change of manner to a gruff compassion Baillie urged Kirk to his feet, helping him to support the Vulcan, who seemed bewildered, confused, by the sudden influx of people. He buried his head on the Captain's shoulder and stood trembling in his sustaining embrace. McCoy, who had been tending the injured guards, took his place in the group, and in a shimmering sparkle of light the Enterprise party was beamed away, leaving a stunned Sheriff, a silent, embarrassed search party - and one somewhat battered prisoner. Making the best of things, Blair organised their return to town.

The following day Sheriff Blair was busy at his desk when the phone rang. He answered it, to hear Captain Kirk's voice.

"I'm at the house to collect my things," he said. "I'd like to see you, to explain - and to say goodbye."

"I'll be there in five minutes," Blair promised.

Kirk was waiting for him in the room he had shared with Spock. As Blair entered, Kirk turned, smiling a greeting.

"How is Mr. Spock?" the Sheriff asked. "I hope my...mistake...hasn't harmed him."

"No, thank God. He was just so afraid when I didn't come back...he thought

you meant to harm him - that's why he knocked you out and ran. And that's how I knew he couldn't be guilty - he could have killed you easily, but even in his fear he's too gentle to harm anyone." His voice softened. "We're taking him home now, to Vulcan. McCoy thinks he's ready...and strong enough for final surgery."

"He'll be all right?" Blair asked anxiously.

"Oh yes - we can be sure of that. If he'd broken last night...but he held on."

"Because he trusted you," Blair said understnadingly.

"As I trust him." Kirk hesitated. "To you he's an alien - but to me... he's my friend. I hope that one day you'll have the chance to see him as he really is."

"So do I. In the meantime...it can't atone - but I'm sorry."

"I know. It's easy to jump to conclusions, isn't it? Just because someone acts strangely, it doesn't mean... but we won't speak of it. You're satisfied the case is closed?"

"Yes. Warders picked up the prisoner this morning. They should have warned me."

Kirk's grin flashed. "They will in future. Our Mr. Baillie had a word with the Governor this morning, and he has the knack of making a strong impression."

"So I noticed."

"Well, I must leave now. Goodbye, Sheriff."

"Goodbye, Captain. Good luck."

As the shimmering column faded and vanished Blair cast a last look at the deserted room. He could not rid himself of the memory of last night, of those two faces, one fine-drawn, handsome, the other a shattered ruin; yet the eyes had been so alike, each regarding the other with faith, and trust, and love.

For just an instant he had been allowed to glimpse a friendship that could transcend all barriers of race and tradition; had learned that it was possible to look beyond the obvious, and find a hidden truth. It was a lesson he thought he would never forget.
